

THIRTY-SIX
 Select DISCOURSES
 Doctrinal *and* Practical;
 Upon the most
 IMPORTANT POINTS
 OF THE
 Christian Religion,

VIZ.

- | | |
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| <p>I. The Great Concern of a <i>Future State</i> after the Dissolution of this World.</p> <p>II. The Excellency and Divine Practice of celebrating the <i>Festivals</i> and <i>Fasts</i> of the Church of England.</p> <p>III. The true Principles of <i>Christian Obedience</i>, consider'd under the Ar-</p> | <p>ticles of <i>Faith</i>, <i>Fear</i>, <i>Hope</i>, and <i>Love</i>; also the Order and Connection of <i>our Saviour's Beatitudes</i>.</p> <p>IV. The right Way to <i>Christian Perfection</i>, shewing the Obligations, Means and Motives to a continued Progress and Perseverance in <i>Faith</i> and <i>Holiness</i>.</p> |
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By SAMUEL JOHNSON, A. M.
 Vicar of Great-Torrington in Devonshire.

VOL. II.

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PART III.

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Four great Principles
OF
Christian Obedience,
VIZ.

FAITH, FEAR, HOPE *and* LOVE,

Stated and Explain'd :

In Eight SERMONS,
Preach'd on several Occasions.

To which is added,

A DISCOURSE on the Order and
Connexion of our *Saviour's Beatitudes.*

By SAMUEL JOHNSON, A. M.
Vicar of Great-Torrington.

VOL. II.

B .

SERMON I.

Faith in CHRIST, the principal Condition of Pardon and Salvation, exemplified in the Case of *Cornelius*, a *Roman* Centurion.

ACTS x. 43.

To him give all the Prophets Witness, that through his Name, whosoever believeth in him, shall receive Remission of Sins.

THIS is the Conclusion of a short Sermon or Discourse, which St. *Peter* preach'd before *Cornelius*, and the Company assembled at his House; the Beginning of which we have set down at the thirty-fourth Verse in these remarkable Words — *Then Peter opened his*

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Mouth and said, of a truth I perceive that God is no Respector of Persons, but in every Nation he that feareth him and worketh Righteousness is accepted with him. The Occasion of this Discourse was this — *Cornelius, a Roman Centurion, famed for his Piety and Charity, was favoured by God with an extraordinary Vision, the Message of an Angel from Heaven, who acquainted him that his Prayers and his Alms were come up for a Memorial before God, and ordered him to send to Joppa for one Simon, whose surname was Peter; who should tell him Words, whereby he and all his House should be saved. Cornelius was not disobedient to the heavenly Vision; but immediately sent for St. Peter, who, when he was come, deliver'd those Words, recorded in this Chapter, by means of which he and all that were with him, were converted, sanctified, and baptised; being thus conducted by an extraordinary Providence into the right Faith, the only sure and certain Way of Salvation. For as the same Apostle told the Jews before, that there is no other Name under Heaven given among Men, whereby they must be saved, but the Name of Jesus Christ; so here he tells the Gentiles, that to him give all the*
Prophets

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Prophets witness, that through his Name, who-soever believeth in him, shall receive Remission of Sins.

The Apostle here takes particular Notice, that the Prophets (who have all, more or less, foreshewn the Coming of *Christ*) have borne Testimony to this great and comfortable Truth, as that *the Redeemer should come to Sion, and turn away Ungodliness from Jacob; that after seventy Years were determined upon God's People and the holy City, he should finish the Transgression, and make an End of Sin, and make Reconciliation for Iniquity; and that in his Days there should be a Fountain opened to the House of David, and to the Inhabitants of Jerusalem, for Sin and Uncleanness.* What the Prophets thus foretold, we see here signally verified and exemplified, in the Case of a religious *beathen* Family, that seem design'd and mark'd out by Providence as the Earnests, Forerunners, and First-fruits of the whole Body of the *Gentile Christians*. They believed what the Prophets had foreshewn, and what the Apostle now declared, and thereupon experienced the saving Effects of their ready Belief, and were made Partakers of the divine Promise. That we

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may be excited to something of the like Readiness of Belief, and that our Belief may be attended with something of the like Efficacy and Success, I shall (1.) consider more distinctly the Case of *Cornelius*, as represented in the Context; and (2.) shew from thence and from the Words of the Text, that *Faith* is the principal Means or Condition required by God for obtaining Remission of Sins.

First, With respect to the particular Case of *Cornelius*, I observe, that when God designs the *End*, he supplies and furnishes *Means* that are fit or appointed to produce that End. God willed and intended the Salvation of this devout *Roman* Soldier, and of all that pertained unto him. Therefore he sent an Angel from Heaven, to give him notice of this his merciful Intention. And the Angel might have preach'd the same Words to him, or Words to the same Effect, as *St. Peter* afterwards did: But that was not then *his* Province, or any Part of his Commission. Tho' superior in Nature, and in Office too in other Respects, yet in this Case he was not invested with that Power and Authority, which *Christ* had delegated only to his Apostles: And God, who is the Author and Lover
of

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of Order, would have every Work contain'd within its proper Post and Station. And this was the present Case: Every one in his own Order discharg'd his respective Office without interfering with the other. The Angel fulfilled the Commandment of God by delivering his Message to *Cornelius*. *Cornelius* performed his Part by sending for *St. Peter*, and attending to the Words deliver'd by him. The Apostle acted agreeably to his general Office and new Commission, by preaching the Gospel to an *heathen* Family, whereby they were converted to the Christian Faith, prepared for the Reception of the Holy Ghost, and admitted into the Pale of the Church by Baptism. Thus every Thing, in this great Affair, was conducted with exact Regularity and Order, and due Submission to the divine Will and Appointment. And the Event answer'd in every respect, and succeeded accordingly. But had either of these broke his Rank, or fail'd in the Performance of what was required; had the Angel presumed to preach to *Cornelius* what properly belong'd to the Apostle; or had the Apostle scrupled to come to an *Heathen*, out of Pretence that he was *the Apostle of the Circumcision*, or because his

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Religion forbid him to converse with Men of another Nation (which we find indeed was his real Sentiment, till a heavenly Vision satisfied him in that Point) or had *Cornelius* refused or neglected to comply with the Angel's Directions in any one Particular; the gracious Design of God, and the Salvation of these primitive *Gentile* Converts might have been entirely frustrated and defeated. So much, so very much depends upon Men's punctual Observance of a divine Command, and waiting the Influences and Gifts of the Holy Spirit in due Time and Place. But this can proceed from nothing but a vigorous and active Faith. *Cornelius*, without Scruple or Hesitation, readily believ'd what was told him by the Angel, and acted immediately in Conformity to that Belief; and, by so doing, saved himself and those that belonged to him. But some perhaps will be ready to object, that it was not the *Faith* of *Cornelius*, but his *good Disposition beforehand*, or his pious and charitable Deeds that recommended him to the Favour and Acceptance of God. This is true in some Sense, and in some respect: But whoever shall presume to argue from thence, that *Faith* is not previously required as indispensably

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bly necessary to Salvation, will be found to argue directly, not only against the Tenour of the Gospel in general, but against this very remarkable Instance in particular. I know the Beginning of St. Peter's Discourse has been often urged in favour of Unbelievers and Hereticks of all Sorts, provided only, that they lead good moral Lives. This, I say, is the Sense that has been put upon these Words of the Apostle. — *Of a truth I perceive, that God is no Respector of Persons, but in every Nation he that feareth him and worketh Righteousness is accepted with him.* I don't deny, but that these Words carry some such Sense in Appearance, or as they stand by themselves, but taken and consider'd jointly with the Context, they will be found to imply the very Reverse of what they are urged for: Which, by the way, may serve to shew us the Danger of applying single Texts or Passages of Scripture to ourselves, or in Proof and Confirmation of any Doctrine, without knowing the Design and Occasion of them, or duly attending to what goes before and what follows: Whereby it may and has sometimes come to pass, that the same Words are produced and urged in favour of two contrary Opinions.

And

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And this will appear, in some measure, to be the present Case. *St. Peter's* affirming, that *in every Nation he that feareth God and worketh Righteousness, is accepted with him;* may seem at first Hearing to countenance the Error of those who think meanly of *Faith*, and are for Framing their Lives according to the bare Light of Reason, and what they judge to be the Law of Nature. But when 'tis considered upon what Occasion, and with what Design the Apostle said this, the Necessity of Believing in *Christ* will be so far from being lessened thereby, that it will only appear abundantly more evident. For the immediate Occasion of the Apostle's speaking these Words, was his being sent for to convert and baptise a Man that had all the proper Qualifications or Endowments that are required by Men professing natural Religion, or mere Morality. At least his Piety and Charity, for which he is so highly commended, may well be supposed to include all the rest. But if *these alone* had been sufficient for Salvation, what Occasion was there for his being converted and baptized? If his moral Endowments, or his great Proficiency in natural Religion, had been able of themselves

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selves to secure the Rewards of the next Life, what Need or Occasion was there for a solemn Ambassage from God by an Angel, of another by two Men to St. *Peter*, of a Vision and Voice from Heaven to remove the Apostle's Scruples about conversing with the *Heathens*, of a religious Meeting at the House of *Cornelius*, to hear what the Apostle had to deliver to them? What Occasion, I say, was there for all this great Solemnity, only to make a Man believe in *Christ*, if his Salvation was already secure without any such Belief? If he had been as perfectly good, and as fully accepted by God *before* his Conversion, as he was *after*, no sufficient Reason can be given for his being converted or baptised. God is not wont to multiply Means to no Purpose, or to employ *extraordinary* Methods where the *ordinary* will suffice. If therefore the good Works and good Dispositions of *Cornelius* had been fully effectual to entitle him to the Favour of God here, and to the Fruition of him hereafter, his Conversion to the Christian Faith, in that uncommon and wonderful Manner, would certainly have been spared. But the Truth is, the Piety and Charity of this *Roman* Centurion,

while

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while he was only a Profelyte of the Gate, or a Professor of mere natural Religion, served only to recommend him to the Divine Clemency, as a fit Object of his *greater Mercy*; which *greater Mercy* was extended to him in his Conversion, without which he could have had no Title at all to the Happiness of Heaven, or the Promise of eternal Life; both because this is the peculiar distinguishing Gift of God, infinitely exceeding all Desert of Man, and the utmost Stretch of human Attainments; (and he that promises such a Gift as this, will bestow it in his own Way, and upon such Terms and Conditions only as he has been pleased to require) and also because 'tis founded on a solemn Covenant, ratified in the Blood of *Christ*: So that no Man ever was, or ever can be saved, *without Believing in Christ*, or without a due Application of his Merits, and a firm Reliance on the Virtue and Efficacy of his Mediation. And our Church declares, that *those are to be had accursed*, who shall presume to say or teach otherwise; because this indeed would be to make the Gospel of *Christ* of none Effect, and to render his Death useless and superfluous. All therefore that can be
gathered

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gathered or inferred from what St. *Peter* asserts, that *in every Nation he that feareth God and worketh Righteousness, is accepted with him*, is this — That in every Age, in every Place, and in every Person, God takes special Notice of, regards, and accepts those previous Habits, and good Dispositions, Tendencies, and Inclinations, that prepare Men for receiving and embracing the Gospel, whenever it is preach'd or made known to them: But 'tis impious and absurd to conclude from hence, that every *moral Heathen* is capable of attaining Salvation, or that bare Morality, *without* the Knowledge and Belief of *Christ*, is sufficient to justify and to save Sinners. If any Exception can be allow'd, if any one Person can be found, that might be thought worthy, in some Measure, of so singular a Favour, and so peculiar an Exemption from the common Way of Salvation, it must be the Instance under Consideration, That of *Cornelius* himself, who had the Testimony of an Angel, and the Approbation of God *so far*, as that his Devotion and Alms-deeds were had in Remembrance, or came up for a Memorial before him, *i. e.* God had a special Regard to this pious Centurion, and look'd upon

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upon him as a rare uncommon Instance of Virtue and Goodness among the *Gentiles*; and therefore vouchsafed him a very uncommon Means of Conversion. And God might be the more inclined to shew such extraordinary Mercy to him, not for his own sake only, but for the Benefit of After-times, and to obviate that very Objection I am now considering, as if good Works alone could entitle Men to Salvation, or were sufficient to supersede the Necessity of Faith and Baptism. To prevent which dangerous Error, and to confirm the Truth of God, this signal Instance is recorded as a standing undeniable Proof of the contrary. For thus the shining Piety and other excellent moral Qualities of *Cornelius* were so far from being thought a Reason why he should not be baptised, so far from being acceptable to God, considered in themselves, or without a Belief in *Christ*, that they were only a Recommendation of him to his being admitted to those high Favours. For *Baptism* is a distinguishing Privilege, and *Faith* is the peculiar Gift of God. And all Endowments *without* that are of no Significance in his Sight. And accordingly our blessed Saviour has most expressly and peremptorily declared, that *he who believeth and is baptised shall be saved*;

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saved; but he that believeth not shall be damn'd. And to this agree the Words of *St. Peter* in my Text, as confirm'd and illustrated in the Case of *Cornelius*——*To him give all the Prophets witness, that thro' his Name, whosoever believeth in him, shall receive Remission of Sins.* Remission of Sins is the first great Blessing of the Gospel, and the Foundation of all the rest, and is here promised to him that believes in *Christ*. But then it must be observed, that tho' *Faith* or Belief be the great indispensable Condition required on our Parts; yet this Remission is to be obtained only *in* and *thro'* the Name of *Jesus Christ*, that is, thro' his all-sufficient Sacrifice and Intercession, as the meritorious and procuring Cause both of Pardon and Salvation: So that tho' we can lay no Claim to a Reward for any thing we have done or can do, and have nothing in ourselves to recommend us to the Mercy of God, but what must at the same time awaken and provoke his Justice; yet we are allow'd to make use of the Name of *Christ*, to inforce our Petitions, to recommend our Services, and to claim and obtain his Promises, and are sure to be heard and accepted on that Account;
nay,

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may, and to be more favourably accepted, and more bountifully rewarded, than if we ourselves had been perfectly innocent and righteous. For our Obedience, had it been never so *compleat*, was still but a *Debt* to our Maker, which we should have been obliged to discharge, whether we had received any Reward for it or not: And the most perfect Obedience of *finite* Creatures, could it possibly merit any thing at the Hands of God, can never be supposed to merit an *eternal* Reward. Our whole Hope therefore, Trust, and Dependance, both for Pardon and Salvation, is upon what our blessed Saviour has done and suffered for us. And 'tis he only, all Things consider'd, that was able to deliver us from the Misery we had incurred, and to procure for us a Happiness so vastly beyond all that we could pretend to deserve, that 'tis more than we could have presumed to desire or hope for. Yea, this had been beyond the Reach even of his own Undertaking, had he not been *God* as well as *Man*: And therefore it is, that a *right Faith in him* does necessarily suppose or imply a firm Belief of his *real* and *essential* Divinity; without which, we could never have had a full Assurance,

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rance, or well-grounded Hope of Pardon and Salvation through him; since no one can be thought able or sufficient to procure these, who is not capable of satisfying infinite Justice, of paying an equivalent Ransom for the Souls of Men, and of meriting and purchasing for them an eternal Reward; which 'tis impossible for any *Creature* to do. Faith therefore in *Christ* is not only indispensably necessary, but the principal Thing required, in order to obtain Remission of Sins and eternal Life. This is the Doctrine of all the Writers of the New Testament, and more particularly of St. *Paul*, and his Doctrine is founded upon the clearest Reason. For, *To him that worketh*, says he, *is the Reward not reckon'd of Grace, but of Debt*; i. e. If we could obtain the Rewards of Heaven by our Works, we might then claim them as a Debt, or as due to our Merits, which is impossible: But *to him that worketh not*, or that looks upon all his own Works as nothing, *but believeth on him that justifieth the Ungodly, his Faith is counted for Righteousness*. And what an abundant Matter of Consolation is this! For, what now tho' we can't be perfectly righteous, or if we were, that we can't by such Righteousness claim or

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merit a Reward; yet we can believe on him that justifieth the Ungodly, and depend on the Righteousness of another for Justification and Salvation; and by such a Faith (if we be not wanting in other Respects) we shall become as fully intitled to the promised Reward, as if we could merit the same by our own Works. Good Works indeed are the proper, natural, and genuine Fruits of a right Faith; and both are equally necessary, and equally to be maintain'd, as inseparable Companions and indispensable Conditions of Salvation; but each of them in its proper Order. *Faith*, as the Root or Principle, generally *precedes*; and *good Works*, as the Fruits or Effects, are to *follow*. For Christian Morality must be founded on Christian Principles. We must believe the Articles of our Creed, before we can be qualified, to observe, as we ought, the Ten Commandments. We must know the Grounds, the Reasons, and the Motives of Obedience, before we shall either be able or disposed to Obey. But if the *Means* of Faith be wanting, God will then for the present accept of such good Works, as Men are able to perform; and in his own good Time reward their sincere Endeavours with the Gift of Faith: By which they will
be

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be enabled to see the Defects of their own Righteousness, become sensible of the great Need they had of a Saviour, and be ready to acknowledge with humble and thankful Hearts, that Pardon and Salvation are Attainable only by *Christ*, and thro' Faith in his Blood. For the clearer Evidence of this, let us here again briefly consider the Case of *Cornelius*. He lived among the *Jews*, and might have heard of the Fame and Miracles of *Jesus*, as *Herod* and other *Heathens* did, who desired to see him, and to see some Miracle done by him. But our Saviour preach'd the Gospel only to the *Jews*, and declared that he was not sent but to the *Lost Sheep of the House of Israel*; and accordingly, during the whole Course of his Ministry, we do not read of any one *Heathen* or *Gentile* converted to the Faith. The Unbelief therefore of *Cornelius* before his Conversion was not his *Fault*, but his *Fate*. He could not believe without a Preacher. But as soon as an Angel was sent to him, he presently obey'd the Message, and shew'd a ready Disposition to believe; and after the Gospel had been preach'd, and the Tender of Salvation made to him by St. *Peter*, he freely and gladly embraced the Christian Faith: Yea,

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while he was hearing and attending to the Apostle's Discourse, the Holy Ghost fell upon him, and by Means thereof, and of the Words that he heard, he was effectually converted to the Faith. But still, after all this, *the Blood of Christ* and the *Waters of Baptism* were necessary to wash away his Sins, and to give him a sure Title to eternal Life, which therefore he willingly and chearfully submitted to. And now from this remarkable Instance I proceed to consider the main Doctrine contain'd in the Text, which, tho' partly explain'd already, may deserve and require some farther Enlargement: But this I shall leave to another Opportunity.

*Now to God the FATHER, God the SON,
and God the HOLY GHOST, Three Per-
sons and One GOD, be ascribed, as is
most due, all Honour and Glory, Might,
Majesty, Obedience, and Thanksgiving,
now, and for evermore. Amen.*

SERMON

SERMON II.

Faith in CHRIST, the principal Condition of Pardon and Salvation.

ACTS X. 43.

To him give all the Prophets Witness, that through his Name, whosoever believeth in him, shall receive Remission of Sins.

AS this is the Conclusion of a Discourse that St. *Peter* made to *Cornelius* and the Company assembled at his House, by Means of which he and all the *Gentiles* that were present were converted to the Christian Faith, I propos'd to treat of this Passage in the following Manner. (1.) To consider more distinctly the Case of this *Roman Centurion*, as represented in the Context. And (2.) To prove from thence, and from the Words of the

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Text, that Faith in *Christ* is the principal Condition required by God for obtaining Remission of Sins. In considering the first of these Heads, I so far then explain'd the general Doctrine contain'd in the second, and implied in the Text, that nothing farther seems wanting, in order to clear and confirm this great Truth, than only to shew, that whatever Condition is required of us as necessary to obtain Remission of Sin, *Faith in Christ* is always included or presupposed; and, therefore, may justly be esteem'd the principal Means or Condition of Forgiveness. This I shall endeavour to make appear from the Consideration of the several Means or Conditions required in the Gospel for this End; which may be reduced to these four, *Baptism, Repentance, Forgiving of Others*, and the *Lord's Supper*. I place them in the Order in which they are commonly observ'd or practis'd, and in that Order I shall consider them.

First, Baptism is a principal Means appointed by *Christ* himself for the Remission of Sins. And the outward and visible Sign annex'd to this Sacrament, is a lively and significant Pledge to assure us thereof. In the New Testament we meet with two Kinds
of

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of Baptism, tho' the *Christian* Baptism is the only Baptism that we are obliged to use, and which once duly administer'd is not to be repeated upon the same Person: And therefore tho' we read of *John's* Baptism as somewhat different and distinct from the *Christian*, yet this, I think, we ought to consider, according to the Exigency of the Times, only as a necessary Preparation and Introduction to the other. *John* indeed was peculiarly ordain'd by God to go before the Face of the Lord, to prepare his Way: And that was by preaching and administering the Baptism of Repentance. And Multitudes of People flock'd to him, and were baptized of him in *Jordan*, confessing their Sins: Which Confession of Sins does not necessarily imply, that they then receiv'd the Benefit of Absolution, or that *John's* Baptism confirm'd this Blessing upon them; since he baptized only with Water, and not with the Holy Ghost; but rather intimates, that they came unto him to be instructed in the right Method of repenting and forsaking their Sins; and therefore 'tis expressly and emphatically call'd the *Baptism of Repentance*, as if design'd only to initiate and put Men into a State and Course of Repentance, in order to

prepare them for believing and entertaining the *Messiah*, and for receiving the full *Christian* Baptism afterwards. And this Example the primitive Church seems all along to have acted in Conformity to, by obliging known Offenders to apply to proper Pastors or Censors appointed for that Purpose, not to receive immediate Absolution, but to receive such Orders of Penance, as the Nature and Quality of their respective Sins did then require. And when they were judg'd to have duly perform'd their Penance, they were then (and not before) admitted into the Number of the Faithful, and receiv'd into full Communion with the Church. The Baptism then of *John* seems chiefly to have been intended to direct and engage the *Jews* of those Times in a right Course of Humiliation and Repentance, and thereby to prepare them for the Reception of that solemn Baptism ordain'd by *Christ*, to which is annex'd the Promise of Forgiveness of Sins and of the Holy Ghost. And this Baptism then administer'd by the Apostles and other Pastors of the Church, in the Name of the Lord *Jesus*, or according to the Form prescribed by him, was attended with wonderful Efficacy and Success, and always judg'd

to

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to be necessary *after* Conversion, and even after the Reception of the Holy Ghost; as is plain in the Case of *St. Paul* and of *Cornelius* and his Household, and of the numerous Converts on the Day of *Pentecost*. Now the Baptism thus instituted by *Christ*, and administer'd by the Church, could not be effectual to the Ends for which it is administer'd, and for which it was ordain'd, were it not accompanied with a true and lively Faith; the Exercise of which is not only proper, but necessary, through every Part of this solemn Office. Our Saviour himself assures us, that *except a Man be born of Water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God. Water* is a *visible* Sign, but the *Spirit*, who is present in Baptism, and who sanctifies and blesses the right and due Administration of it, is *invisible*, and as such only the Object of Faith. And the Blessings intended to be bestow'd by this Sacrament are likewise of a spiritual and invisible Nature; and these we can be assured of only by Faith, not always by the Faith of the Persons *baptised*, which now-a-days are generally *Infants*, nor only by the Faith of the Person *baptising*, but by the Faith of the *Sponsors* and *Parents*, one of which

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which at least must be a Believer in outward Profession, or otherwise the Child has no Right to Baptism. For so *St. Paul* seems to have determin'd the Case. *For the unbelieving Husband, says he, is sanctified by the Wife, and the unbelieving Wife is sanctified by the Husband: Else were your Children unclean, but now are they holy.* That is, the Children of mere *Heathens* have no Right or Title to the Privilege of *Christian* Baptism: But if one of the Parents were a *Heathen*, and the other a *Christian* (which was a common Case in the primitive Times) then the better Part over-balanced the worse, and was allowed by God to convey or confer a Right upon the Children to be baptised. This I take to be the true Meaning of this Passage; which plainly relates to the outward Profession of the *Christian* Faith in one of the Parents, as necessary to entitle their Children to the Privilege of Baptism, and to keep them from being reputed and treated as *Heathens*, as common or unclean, and *Strangers to the Covenant of Promise*. The same is to be observed of the Sponsors or *Sureties*; who, when demanded, whether, in the Name of the Child then to be baptised, they believe all the Articles of the *Christian* Faith then rehears'd

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rehears'd to them, are required by our Church to answer audibly and directly, *All this I steadfastly believe.* Thus are Children, through the Faith of others, admitted into the Pale of *Christ's* Church, and made capable of spiritual Regeneration, or of being born anew of Water and of the Spirit. Baptism likewise requires more particularly a Belief in the Death and Resurrection of *Christ*, and obliges Christians to a Conformity to both, by rising from the Death of Sin unto a Life of Righteousness. It implies also a firm Belief in the Promises on God's Part of the New Covenant, made and ratified in this Sacrament, viz. of Pardon, Grace and eternal Life. And one Branch of the Covenant on our Part, as was observed before, is a Belief of all the Articles of the Christian Faith, and an open Profession of such Belief. It requires or supposes likewise a Belief in the Ordinance itself, as the Institution of *Christ*, and an explicate Faith in the Doctrine of the Blessed Trinity, and of three equally Divine Persons, *Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*, in whose Name we are baptised, and to whose Service we are devoted by Baptism. So great an Exercise of Faith does the administering and receiving of this
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holy Sacrament call for; and, without Faith, 'tis impossible that it should be administer'd or received as it ought; which should be an Admonition to Parents to take care, as far as in them lies, that Christian Baptism be duly and regularly administer'd; since by this sacred Ordinance, not only the *Water* is sanctified to the mystical washing away of Sin, but the *Child* to be baptised is brought to the Font, in order to be sanctified and regenerated by the Holy Ghost. But then, as this solemn Institution may be so far made void and of no effect, by Sins committed after Baptism, as to render the Persons so sinning obnoxious to the Wrath of God, and to make them stand in great Need of Forgiveness, in order to be sanctified and saved; therefore God, in great Tenderness and Compassion, has appointed another constant Means to be made use of, for recovering his Favour, and repairing the Breaches that have been made in our Part of the Baptismal Covenant; and that is,

Secondly, The great Duty of Repentance, which is more or less necessary all along, or through every Stage of our Life, but then more especially and more indispensably so, after the Commission of any wilful

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or presumptuous Sins. But that this is effectual for the obtaining of Pardon, through the Satisfaction of *Christ*, is abundantly evident from the whole Tenour of the Gospel, which is no other than the publishing and proclaiming the glad Tidings of God's Reconciliation to Sinners upon their Repentance. But it would be impious and absurd to expect Forgiveness upon easier Terms, considering that a State of Sin is a State of Enmity and Opposition against God; and to hope for his Forgiveness, while we are transgressing his righteous Laws, is to hope to be encouraged and upholden in Acts of Hostility and Rebellion against him. No; we must first lay down our Arms and cease to do Evil, and then with all Humility and Contrition deplore our past Follies and Provocations, and cast ourselves upon the divine Clemency, and earnestly sue to God for Mercy and Forgiveness, through the sufferings and Satisfaction of his dear Son, and upon this we need not doubt of a gracious Acceptance and merciful Pardon. We may have some Reason indeed to distrust ourselves, but can have none to distrust God. If our Repentance be true and sincere, we may infallibly be assured of God's making good his Promise, and fulfilling this Part of his Covenant

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nant to us: We may fully depend upon the Power of *Christ* to pardon us, upon his Sacrifice to atone for our Sins, and upon the Influences of the Holy Spirit to renew and sanctify us. True Repentance and Forgiveness are inseparable, and always go together, or succeed one another. And accordingly it was our Saviour's Injunction to his Apostles, that both *Repentance and Remission of Sins* should at the same Time *be preach'd in his Name among all Nations, beginning at Jerusalem.* But now the Repentance, to which the Promise of Pardon is annex'd, necessarily presupposes a right Faith: And we may observe, that *Faith* is more commonly mention'd as a Condition of Forgiveness, than even Repentance itself. The Reason is, that Repentance, Prayer, and Almsgiving, and other moral Duties, may be practis'd, in some Measure, in a State of *Nature*, as we find they were in the Case of *Cornelius*: But *Faith* is the peculiar and distinguishing Grace of *Christianity*, that which is most expressly required, that which is most earnestly and repeatedly urged and inculcated throughout the whole *New Testament*, that which is most indispensably necessary, and that not only to the *Well-being*, but to the very *Being* of a *Christian*. And therefore St. *Paul* particularly

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ticularly advises the *Corinthians* to *examine themselves, whether they be in the Faith*; which is more than he any where expressly says with respect to *Repentance*. The Reason may be, because Faith is the Foundation of Repentance, and not Repentance of Faith. *I believed, and therefore have I spoken*, says the Apostle; and so every Christian may say in this Case, I believed, and therefore have I repented; I believed what God has promised, and what he has threaten'd, what our Saviour has done and suffer'd, and what he has revealed; and this is the great Inducement to Repentance: But without Faith there can be no true Repentance, and consequently no Pardon. Yea, there is not any one Part of Repentance that can be performed without the Exercise of a lively Faith. *Conviction of Guilt*, which is the first Part or lowest Degree of Repentance, implies a just Sense and Apprehension of the infinite Majesty of that God who is offended, and of the amazing Sufferings which Men have exposed themselves to by their Sins. *Humiliation, Contrition, and Sorrow*, have likewise a particular Respect to the Person offended, as well as to their own Sinfulness and Demerits. *Confession of Sin* and *Supplication for Mercy* are direct Acts of Faith,

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Faith, or Applications of the Soul to him who is invisible, a doing Honour to his Attributes of Justice and Mercy, and a Reliance on the Merits and Mediation of *Christ*. Serious *Purposes*, and well-grounded *Resolutions* of Amendment, imply a firm Trust and Dependence on a divine Succour and Assistance, without which all Men's own Labours and Endeavours would be vain and ineffectual. And even *actual Amendment* is no other than the Fruit of a sound and vigorous Faith, of a *Faith that worketh by Love*. So much Occasion is there for the Exercise of Faith through every Post or Stage of Repentance. But in order to prove the Truth of our Repentance, and to have the Remission of Sins more and more confirm'd to us, our Saviour requires another necessary Means or express Condition of Forgiveness; and that is,

Thirdly, A Readiness to forgive those that have offended us, as we desire the Forgiveness of our Offences at God's Hands. This is most expressly and indispensably required. For after our blessed Lord had taught us to pray, *Forgive our Debts, as we forgive our Debtors*, he added these peremptory Words by way of Caution and Encouragement in this respect, *For if you forgive Men their Trespases, your heavenly*

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heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not Men their Trespases, neither will your Father forgive your Trespases. From which Words 'tis most evident, that we can't shew our own Repentance, or secure God's Forgiveness, without forgiving our offending Brethren: This is the natural Result of true Repentance. If we are truly sorry for our Sins, and are duly sensible of what we have deserved, we can't be rigid and implacable towards those who are compassed about with the like Infirmities. And if we have been *actually forgiven* by God, we can't refuse somewhat of the like Mercy and Favour to those who have injured and offended us, without provoking God to revoke and cancel his former Grant of Mercy, and to hold us still as guilty as if we had never been forgiven by him. But if we are only *suing* for Mercy, and earnestly seeking to God for Pardon and Reconciliation, an unmerciful and unforgiving Temper will then be an effectual Bar to our obtaining what we desire. Nor is it only vain, but highly presumptuous, to desire and expect Forgiveness from our great Creator, while we deny Forgiveness to any of our Fellow-creatures. On the other hand, if we are

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always ready to forgive the Offences and Trespases of others, as this is generally a sure Token of the Sincerity of our own Repentance, so is it the readiest Way both to obtain Forgiveness from God, and to continue in a State of Favour and Forgiveness with him. For God will not be outdone by us in Acts of Mercy and Charity; and therefore we may assure ourselves from the Consideration of his *Nature* as well as his *Promise*, that our Readiness to forgive others will incline the Goodness of God towards ourselves. Yea, when our Conscience bears us witness, that we do truly and sincerely forgive the Trespases of others against us, we are allow'd to petition, and even to claim, as it were, of God a Performance of his Promise, the Forgiveness of our Trespases against him; provided only, that we be sincere in other respects. This is one Sense, in which those Words may be taken — *Forgive us our Debts, AS (or FOR, as 'tis in St. Luke) we forgive our Debtors.* Where our forgiving of others is urged as a *Reason* to incline God to forgive us. This is our *Memo-rial*, to remind him of his gracious Promise to cancel our Debts, and remit the Punishment due to our Sins. This is our *Title*, our
Plea,

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Plea, or *Testimonial*, when we come before him, that we are so far qualified for his Pardon, and to be received into Favour: We are allowed, I say, to plead before God our own Forbearance, Charity, and Forgiveness towards others, as so many Reasons and Arguments for God's extending the like Mercy and Compassion towards ourselves. And in this Sense it is most certainly true, that *Charity covereth a Multitude of Sins*. Our Charity in forbearing and forgiving others will incline the Father of Mercies and God of all Comfort to pass by many of our own Offences without Punishment, as well as to pardon others after due Correction. Now from this Account 'tis easy to observe, that *Faith in Christ* must bear a principal Part in the Discharge of this great evangelical Precept. His Promise and Threatening is the Motive or Inducement to a Compliance in this Case; and nothing but a firm Belief and serious Consideration of what he has so fully and peremptorily declared, can prevail with angry and revengeful Men to put in Practice this otherwise very disagreeable and difficult Duty. And 'tis nothing but want of Faith in this respect, that makes Men at any Time unmerciful and irre-

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concileable. But further, that we may be fully entitled to this Pardon, and have the firmest Assurance of it that can be attain'd in the present State, we must, in the

Fourth Place, have frequent Recourse to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper; which will ratify all that was done for us, or conferred upon us in the first Sacrament of Baptism, confirm those Hopes of Pardon we have entertain'd from a Consciousness of our own Repentance, and testify and promote our Reconciliation with God and with one another. It has been thought indeed, that this Sacrament was not directly design'd and ordain'd, as the other is, for the Remission of Sins; but only to nourish that new spiritual Life which we receiv'd at Baptism. But whatever some may think, or however they may express themselves on this Occasion, there is little Doubt to be made, but that the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, as well as that of Baptism, was originally design'd for the Remission of Sins. This Sacrament indeed, as now used and administer'd by us, can only wash away the Guilt and Pollution of *original Sin*. The primitive Practice in this Case is no Rule or Standard to us. Many or most
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of the first Christians were (like those Labourers in the Vineyard mention'd in our Lord's Parable) not hired till the ninth or eleventh Hour, and did not come into the Church before the middle or till toward the latter Stage of their Life; and this makes a wide Difference in the Case. For those Sins must be allow'd to have been attended with much greater Aggravations of Guilt, that were committed by the Christians of those Days, *so soon after* their Conversion, *so soon after* Baptism, and in the midst of such numerous shining Examples of Virtue and Piety as the Church then abounded with, than those of the same Kind can be, that have since been committed in any of the degenerate and declining Ages of Christianity, in the Time of Youth, or in the middle Age of Men, and *so long after* their Admission into Covenant with God by Baptism. And it can't well be supposed, that *for all these Sins* God has provided no Means or Ordinance for conveying, sealing, and insuring to us the Forgiveness of Sins. If we can't but allow, that our Saviour, in the Institution of this Sacrament, had an Eye to *After-ages*, as well as to the *primitive* Times, we may rea-

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sonably presume from thence (had we no other Argument to prove it by) that the Sacrament of his Supper, was, among other Ends, more particularly design'd for the Remission of Sins. But we have sufficient Evidence of this even in the Apostles Days. The Sin of the *Corinthians*, with respect to this Sacrament, was a very flagrant One, as they were guilty of great Uncharitableness towards their poorer Brethren, of great Irreverence and Profaneness towards God, of an high Abuse of this solemn Ordinance of *Christ*, and of shameful Excess and Intemperance at the very Time of Communicating; all which were great Aggravations of Guilt; and yet, tho' the Apostle severely rebuked, and God severely punished them for this Sin by Diseases and Death, they were not forbid to come any more to this Sacrament, but only exhorted to examine and prepare themselves better for the future, that so they might receive worthily, and thereby obtain Remission for this as well as for their other Sins. And if we examine the Institution itself, whatever Light we consider it in, we shall find that this is the first principal Benefit design'd to be convey'd thereby. All acknowledge, that our
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bleſſed Lord's Command to *do this in Remembrance of him*, obliges us to the Commemoration not only of *what* he actually ſuffer'd, but of the *Ends* for which he ſuffer'd, that ſo we may be Partakers of the Benefits thereof. Now we know that the principal End, for which he ſuffer'd (with reſpect to us) was the Remiſſion of Sins; which therefore is to be obtain'd *in* and *by* this Sacrament, as intended to convey to us *all* the Benefits of his Death and Paſſion. But that we might not be left wholly to remote Inferences or Deductions in ſo important a Point, our Saviour himſelf has plainly determin'd the Caſe for us in the very Words of Inſtitution. For when he delivered the Cup to his Diſciples, he ſaid, *Drink ye all of it: For this is my Blood of the New Teſtament, which is ſhed for many,* **FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS.** And that theſe laſt Words refer to the Sacrament then firſt inſtituted, as well as to the Sacrifice afterwards to be offer'd on the Croſs, is abundantly evident from the Mention of them at the Time of Inſtitution: And 'tis plain that our Church underſtands them in this Senſe, by inserting and retaining them in her Conſecration-prayer.

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prayer. And now if we desire to partake of this and other Benefits of this holy Sacrament, we must *draw near with Faith*, and be fully assured that God is ready, on his Part, to make good his gracious Promises to us in this sacred Ordinance, by Means of outward, material, and visible Signs, which are intended to represent and convey to our Souls Things spiritual, mystical, and invisible. But we must take care not to mistake and confound the Signs with the Things signified, or to make and believe them to be one and the same, which would destroy the Nature of a Sacrament, as it consists of two Parts, an outward Sign and an inward Grace, so that even *after* Consecration, they are still to be consider'd as really distinct; only by receiving the one, in a worthy Manner, we believe and are sure to receive the other. By believing that *Christ* is present with us in the Sacrament, tho' in a Manner not to be explain'd or comprehended by us, we enjoy the Benefits of a holy Communion with him. By believing that the Virtue and Efficacy of his Sacrifice on the Cross is convey'd and imparted to us in this holy Sacrament, we secure to ourselves a Share and Interest in all the Merits of
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his Death and Passion. All, you see, depends upon a right Belief and a due Exercise of Faith, even our Repentance and Preparation, as well as the Celebration of this sacred Ordinance. Let us then endeavour to purify our Hearts by Faith, and to prepare ourselves beforehand for a due Participation of these holy Mysteries, and for enjoying such inestimable Benefits, as *Faith* only can give us an Evidence or Assurance of; that so we may neither neglect nor abuse such great Privileges and Advantages, as are design'd to advance us in Holiness here, and to perfect us in Glory and Happiness hereafter.

*Now to God the FATHER, God the SON,
and God the HOLY GHOST, be ascribed,
as is most due, all Glory, Honour, Thank-
giving, and Praise, now and for ever.
Amen.*

S E R-

S E R M O N III.

The Preheminence of Faith above Works, represented in the Case of another *Roman Centurion*.

MATT. viii. 10.

When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, verily I say unto you, I have not found so great Faith, no not in Israel.

THE Fame of our Lord's Miracles had reach'd so far, that *Gentiles* as well as *Jews* began to resort to him for Relief: Among the rest, a *Roman Centurion* made Application to him in Behalf of a sick Servant of his that was dear unto him. But having conceived a higher and
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more worthy Opinion of our Saviour's Person and Office, than the *Jews* themselves had hitherto entertain'd of him, he signified his Intention and Desire in the most humble and becoming Manner: Not presuming to go to *Jesus* directly himself, nor to invite him to his House, as not thinking himself worthy to receive so great a Person under his Roof, he sent some Friends of his to present his Petition, and by them so fully declared his Faith as well as Humility, that our Lord could not forbear expressing his Admiration at so uncommon an Instance in an *Heathen*. The Messengers that were sent, in order to recommend their Friend the Centurion the more effectually to our Saviour's compassionate Regard, represented not only the Danger the Servant was in, but the Worth and Character of the Master, his great Affection to the *Jewish* Nation, and his Piety and Liberality in building them a Synagogue. But our Lord takes express Notice only of the Eminency of his Faith; which appear'd on this Occasion in a remarkable and distinguishing Manner. For as *Jesus* was going with the first Messengers to the House, he was met on the Way by some other Friends of the Centurion, who deliver'd this farther Message from him.

Lord,

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Lord, trouble not thyself: For I am not worthy that thou should'st enter under my Roof. Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: But say in a Word, and my Servant shall be healed. For I also am a Man set under Authority, having under me Soldiers: And I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my Servant, Do this, and he doth it. Such singular and uncommon Expressions (in which is couch'd an eminent Degree of Faith, as will be shewn hereafter) coming from the Mouth of an unconverted *Roman* Officer, excited our blessed Saviour's Admiration and Praise, and inclined him not only immediately to gratify his Request, but to recommend him to the *Jews* themselves as a Pattern worthy of their Imitation.

The Case of *Cornelius*, another *Roman* Centurion (which I considered in Two late Discourses) is somewhat parallel to this, tho' differing in some particular Circumstances. He was highly commended and rewarded for his pious and charitable Works; *this* for his eminent and extraordinary Faith. The one was favoured and honoured by our Saviour while he was upon Earth; the other had
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the Message of an Angel from him after he was ascended into Heaven. Both were remarkable uncommon Instances of Humility, Piety, Faith, and Charity. The *humble* Centurion, who thought himself unworthy to receive our blessed Lord into his House, or to meet him upon the Way, had every Thing immediately granted him that he was pleased to ask. The *charitable* Centurion, whose Alms-deeds were come up for a Memorial before God, was admitted, with his whole Family, to the highest Privileges and Favours, visited with the Salvation of God, and made to partake of the Felicity of his Chosen. Nor can we suppose that the Centurion, whose Case I am considering, was favoured only with temporal Advantages, with the miraculous Recovery of his Servant, tho' all that he then petitioned: The Declaration which *Christ* makes, in the Words following my Text, seems to imply a great deal more — *And I say unto you, that many shall come from the East and West, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the Kingdom of Heaven.* Which Words, tho' they are no direct Proof, that this Centurion was *then* converted to the Christian Faith, which

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was not our Saviour's Business or Design at that Time, he being sent to preach the Gospel not to the *Gentiles*, but to the *Jews*, yet they strongly intimate his Conversion afterwards. For our Lord's working so many miraculous Cures upon the Bodies of Men, during his Abode amongst them, disposed their Minds to a more easy Reception of his Gospel, by the Preaching of his Apostles. And we may well suppose, that a Man so eminent for his Faith in one particular Case, could not be a Disbeliever in other respects, whenever we suppose the other Articles of the Christian Faith were preached or propounded to him, either at this Time or any other. Indeed that Confession of Faith, which this Centurion made on this Occasion, carries in it so just an Acknowledgment, and so high a Veneration of the Person and Authority of our blessed Saviour, as may well become the Mouth of the most pious Christian, and such as our Lord himself declared he had not then found in all the *Jewish Nation*. *When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, verily I say unto you, I have not found so great Faith, no not in Israel.* In Discourfing on which Words, I shall

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shall (1.) briefly inquire into the true Meaning of those Expressions of the Centurion, by which he declared his Faith, and for which he is so particularly commended by our Saviour. (2.) I propose to shew that our Lord, during the Time of his Ministry, always regarded Men's Faith more than any other Virtue, or virtuous Disposition whatsoever. And (3.) I shall offer some probable Reasons for his so doing. And,

First, I shall briefly inquire into the true Meaning of those Expressions, by which the Centurion declared his Faith, and for which he is so particularly commended by our Saviour. These we have in the two foregoing Verses——*The Centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my Roof; but speak the Word only, and my Servant shall be healed. For I am a Man under Authority, having Soldiers under me. And I say unto this Man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my Servant, Do this, and he doth it.* Now here the great Question is, what the Centurion might mean by desiring our Saviour to heal his Servant at a distance, and only with a Word's speaking, and then giving this Reason

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son for it—— *For I also am a Man set under Authority, having under me Soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth.* These Words must be applicable to *Christ* in one Sense or other ; but in what Sense to take them, is the Difficulty. If the Centurion supposed that *Christ* could heal his Servant by a Divine Power inherent in him, or by his Almighty Word, there was then no Occasion indeed for his coming or sending. He might perform the Cure at a distance as well as near at hand, and by himself, without sending any other. But this does not answer or come up to the Import of the Expressions ; which plainly suppose our Saviour to be invested with a Divine Authority, with proper Officers or Servants under him, whom he might command and empower to do what he himself is here requested to perform. But then the Question again will be, *who these Servants are*, that our Lord might employ on such Occasions. Now these could be only the *holy Apostles*, or the *holy Angels*. With respect to the former, the Centurion might justly conclude, that our blessed Lord, who was supreme in Authority over these, could do much more than *he* was able to do, by commanding

commanding the Soldiers under him: And therefore might only desire one of these his Apostles to be dispatched to him for the Cure of his Servant, as knowing perhaps that he had sent them out before, to heal all manner of Sickness, and all manner of Disease among the People. But this being Matter of Fact, Observation and Experience, does not reach or fully answer that high and singular Commendation which our Saviour gives of this Centurion's Faith. And therefore we may more reasonably conclude, that this *Roman* Officer had a true and just Notion of our Lord's Person, as the promised *Messiah* or Son of God; and consequently, that all created Beings in Heaven and Earth were subject unto him, that all the angelical Orders were his Ministers and Attendants, and that he might send or command either of these in a Moment of Time, or at a Word's speaking, for the Removal of any Disease, or for the Working any other miraculous Effect. If we take the Words in this Sense, it fully justifies our Saviour's great Commendation of the Centurion's Faith; which can't otherwise be easily accounted for. — *I have not found so great Faith, no not in Israel.*

Yes, there might be so great Faith in *Israel* at that Time, as to believe and know that the *Apostles* had wrought many miraculous Cures, by a Power and Authority derived from *Christ*: But there was not then such a Faith in *Israel*, as to believe that the *Angels* were subject to *Christ*, and wholly at his Command; which seems to have been the peculiar and distinguishing Faith of this *Roman* Centurion, who might have been favoured with a Belief or Persuasion, that as Diseases are often inflicted by evil Spirits; so both good and evil Angels were under the Power and Dominion of *Jesus Christ*: Who therefore may be said, on this Account, as the Centurion speaks of himself, to be *a Man set under Authority*, as acting by Commission from, and in Subordination to, his heavenly Father, *having Soldiers under him*, the Ministry of the holy Angels; and *he saith unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to his Servant, Do this, and he doth it*. In this Sense the Words of the Centurion are plain and perspicuous, and fully expressive of a strong and lively Faith; and then too, our Saviour's Commendation of him appears to be highly just and reasonable.

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able. But take them in any other Sense, they are flat, obscure, and hardly intelligible. We will suppose then, and now take for granted, that this Centurion firmly believed our blessed Saviour, as Son of God, to be Lord of the invisible World, that all Creatures are ready to do him Service, that all the Elements are obedient to his Will, and all the holy Angels, his ministring Spirits, sent forth by him, to minister unto them who shall be Heirs of Salvation. Having thus considered the Meaning of the Context, I proceed,

Secondly, To consider what is contained in, or may be inferred from the Text itself; *namely*, that our Saviour has a special Regard to Men's *Faith*, and is always ready to reward it more than any other Virtue, or virtuous Disposition whatsoever. I don't mean a naked and barren Faith, or when separated from good Works, but a *Faith which worketh by Love*. And such a Faith as this, I say, is always sure to find from our Saviour a ready Acceptance and Approbation, and to be preferred before any one good Work considered or taken by itself. This is plain in the Case of this Centurion, who was recommended to our Lord for his Love to the *Jewish*

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Nation, in building them a Synagogue, and by his respectful Behaviour to *Christ* himself; that is, for his Piety, Charity, and great Humility: All which, no doubt, induced and inclined our Lord to shew all Willingness and Readiness to gratify so worthy a Person in any reasonable Request. But that which he takes more particular Notice of; that which he seem'd to marvel at as something very extraordinary in a *Heathen*; that which he mentions with the highest Approbation and Esteem, is his *Faith*. *Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great Faith, no not in Israel.* And then turning to the Messengers, he sent this Word to the Centurion — *As thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee; and his Servant was healed in the self-same Hour.* It was his Belief of the high Dignity of our Saviour's Person, that made him behave with so much Humility and Respect. It was his Belief of his Power and Goodness, that made him to ask such a Favour or Miracle from him. And to this Belief, the miraculous Effect itself is in part ascribed — *As thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee.* And this and the like, we find, was our Lord's usual Expression

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sion to those he healed — *According to your Faith, so be it unto you* — And *thy Faith hath saved thee, go in Peace.* Of this we have another remarkable Instance, somewhat parallel to that in my Text, in the Woman of *Canaan*; who cried after our Saviour, earnestly entreating his Piety and Relief for a Daughter of her's that was grievously vex'd with a Devil. But *Jesus* for some Time gave her no Answer. Still she continued to implore his Mercy, and he still continued silent. Then his Disciples interceded for her; but he told them, that he was *not sent but to the lost Sheep of the House of Israel.* After this, *she came and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.* Then he vouchsafed her an Answer, but a very discouraging one, and such as might have been taken for an absolute Denial. *It is not meet, says he, to take the Children's Bread, and to give it unto Dogs.* But notwithstanding this Answer she would not desist, nor be discouraged, but took Occasion from hence to renew and re-inforce her Petition, acknowledging her Unworthiness, and that she deserved to be treated no better than *Dogs*, but hoped withal that she should not fare worse than they — *Truth, Lord,* said she,

54 *The Prebeminence of* Ser. 3.

she, yet the Dogs eat of the Crums which fall from their Master's Table. Upon this, our Lord was moved with Compassion, and immediately granted her Request, being quite overcome and vanquish'd, as it were, with the Force and Prevalence of her Faith, crying out with a sort of Astonishment, *O Woman, great is thy Faith, be it unto thee, even as thou wilt, and her Daughter was made whole from that very Hour.* Here we plainly see the Efficacy and Acceptableness of a lively Faith, and how well-pleasing it is in the Sight of our gracious Redeemer; and yet a firm persevering Faith will recommend us to his Mercy, when nothing else can. But the Instances I have already mentioned were only *Heathens and Pagans*: Such was the *Roman Centurion*, and this *Woman of Canaan*; *Aliens from the Commonwealth of Israel, and Strangers to the Covenant of Promise.* And tho' with respect to the former of these, our Saviour declared that he had not found so great Faith, no not in Israel; yet this must be understood in general of the *unconverted Jews* only. For among his Followers, there were some whose Faith was as highly commended by him, as that of the Centurion; of which

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I shall mention two Instances, one that happened before this, and the other after. The first is *Nathaniel*, that *Israelite indeed, in whom was no Guile*; and whose Readiness to believe and acknowledge *Christ* for the *Son of God*, and *King of Israel*, procured from him, not only Acceptance and Approbation for the present, but the peculiar Honour and Privilege of being one of his constant Attendants, or a Place in the College of the Apostles. For he had not an immediate Call to the Apostleship, as others had; but being conducted and introduced into our Lord's Presence by the friendly Office of *St. Philip* the Apostle, he made that noble Confession of Faith, which we may well suppose was one Reason and Occasion of his Admission afterwards to that high Office and Dignity. When he first came to *Christ*, he laboured under some little Prejudices as to the Place of his Residence, and when *Philip* said to him, *we have found him, of whom Moses in the Law, and the Prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth the Son of Joseph*, he made Answer, *can there any good Thing come out of Nazareth?* But upon hearing our Lord declare to him his general Character,

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and the particular Place he was at, when *Philip* called him, he was so perfectly satisfied with this Declaration, that he commenced at once a Convert, a Disciple, and a Confessor, which he fully testified by this joyful and pious Acknowledgment——*Rabbi, thou art the Son of Son, thou art the King of Israel*; which ready Belief of his the merciful *Jesus* promised to reward with greater Demonstrations of his Divinity afterwards. Now this Instance may serve to teach us, by the Way, that there are hardly any Doctrines so clear and evident, but some little Objections may lie against them, and that Men of Uprightness and Sincerity may for a Time conceive and entertain some little Prejudices against the Truth; but that to such upright and sincere Inquiries God will at length afford an Opportunity, or open a Way for removing their Prepossessions, and for believing and embracing the Truth. The other Instance is *St. Peter*, whom our Lord, upon his confessing him to be *the Christ, the Son of the living God*, pronounced, in a solemn Manner, peculiarly blessed——*Blessed art thou Simon Barjona; for Flesh and Blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in Heaven.* To these we may add the

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the Woman that poured a very costly and precious Ointment on our Saviour's Head, as he sat at Meat, out of Reverence and Respect to the Dignity and Divinity of his Person, and obtained this remarkable Testimony of his high Approbation and Esteem of what she had done — *Verily I say unto you, wheresoever this Gospel shall be preached in the whole World, there shall also this, that this Woman hath done, be told for a Memorial of her.* And all that she did was the Effect of a true and lively Faith, which our blessed Lord ever did, and ever will regard, and has promised to reward in this Life, or in the next. And now from what has been said, we shall be able more easily to discern the Difference between Faith and good Works, with respect to the great Point of *Justification*. For tho' both are necessary, and one without the other is vain and insignificant; yet 'tis certain, that the Scripture ascribes more to one, than to the other, and that our Saviour has all along shewed a greater Regard to the former, than to the latter. 'Twas the Weakness or Strength of their Faith that he took more particular Notice of in his Disciples, and blamed or commended them for; and for the
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58 *The Prebeminence of* Ser. 3.

the Trial and Exercise of this, he brought or suffered them to be led into many Temptations and Dangers. Indeed, as to the Point of Justification, St. *James* seems to make Works as necessary as Faith, when he affirms, that *by Works a Man is justified, and not by Faith only*; which, to Appearance, contradicts what St. *Paul* asserts, that *a Man is justified by Faith without the Deeds of the Law*: I say, *to Appearance*; for the Disagreement between these two Apostles is in Word only, and not in Reality. They both make mention of *Works*; but both by that Expression don't mean the same thing. St. *James*, by *Works*, plainly understands what are properly called *good Works*, or such as proceed from Faith, and are wrought or effected by the Aid and Influence of the Holy Spirit. St. *Paul* means only or chiefly the Works of the Law, or such as may be performed in the State of Nature, and without a supernatural Assistance: And these have no manner of Pretence to Justification. Nor indeed are the good Works mentioned by St. *James* the Cause or Ground of our Justification, considered in themselves, but only as they are joined with and proceed from Faith.

Nor

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Nor on the other hand can we hope to be justified by Faith, unless that Faith produce in us the Fruit of good Living. So that whether we say, that we are justified by a Faith that is fruitful in good Works, or by Works that are the proper, natural, and genuine Fruits of Faith, 'tis much the same in Effect; tho' our Justification is most commonly and more directly ascribed to Faith, as the *Root* and *Principle*, and only *remotely* and *consequentially* to good Works. Upon which we can have no farther Trust and Dependance, than as they are the Fruits of *Faith* and *Grace*. Nor can the best even of these abide the Test of the Divine Scrutiny; *If God should enter into Judgment, no Man living could be justified in his Sight.* During the present State, we shall always stand in need of Mercy: Nor can those pretend to be justified by Works, who, whether conscious of Guilt or not, are to the last to sue for Pardon. But we shall be justified, or accounted and accepted as righteous, if we *believe on him that justifieth the ungodly*; not *while* we are ungodly, but *after* we have ceased to be so. We should ever remember that Faith and Works must always go together. To
leave

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leave out either, is to lose both. Their Life or vital Energy consists in their Union, and their Death or Unprofitableness in their Separation. We cannot shew or be sure that we have a right Faith, without the Fruit of good Works; and the only Works that God will accept and reward are those that proceed from Faith; from such a Faith as hath an Eye to the Divine Command and Promise for their Ground and Motive; to the Aids and Operations of the Spirit in the Performance; to the Merits of *Christ* for their Acceptance; and to the free Grace and Bounty of God for their Reward. *Where then is boasting, says St. Paul? It is excluded. By what Law? Of Works? Nay, but by the Law of Faith; which disclaims all Pretences to Merit, and ascribes all to the Glory of God. And therefore to be justified by Faith, and to be justified by Grace, are Expressions used by this same Apostle, to signify one and the same Thing. Therefore likewise we find, that tho' Abraham was highly commended by God, and obtained from him the Promise of an exceeding great Reward, for his ready Obedience in offering up his only Son; yet it is his Faith, for which he is so celebrated by the sacred Writers;*

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Writers; it was his *Faith*, that procured him the honourable Title of the *Father of the Faithful*, and by which he is more particularly said to be *justified*.—*Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for Righteousness*. He was not *made* righteous by his Faith, but he was *deemed, accepted, and treated* as righteous on that Account. So very acceptable and well-pleasing in the Sight of God is a true and lively Faith. Having therefore shewn, that our blessed Saviour, while upon Earth, regarded Men's Faith more than their Works, I should now proceed to offer some Reasons for his doing so; but this I design, God willing, to make the Subject of another Discourse.

*Now to God the FATHER, God the SON,
and God the HOLY GHOST, be ascribed,
as is most due, all Glory and Praise, all
Might and Majesty, now and for evermore.
Amen.*

SERMON

S E R M O N I V.

The Preheminence of Faith above
Works.

MATT. viii. 10.

*When Jesus heard it, he marvelled,
and said to them that followed,
verily I say unto you, I have not
found so great Faith, no not in
Israel.*

IN discoursing on these Words, I was,
First, to inquire wherein the Greatness
of the Faith here recommended did
consist; *Secondly*, to prove that our blessed Sa-
viour, during the Time of his Ministry, al-
ways shewed a greater Regard to Men's Faith,
than to their Works: And, *Thirdly*, to offer
some Reasons for his so doing.

As

Ser. 4. *The Preheminence, &c.* 63

As to the Greatness of the Centurion's Faith, This, as I endeavoured to make appear, consisted in his firm Belief and Persuasion of *Christ's* Divine Power and Authority, and in acknowledging, in Effect, that as he acted by a Divine Commission, so he was himself likewise Lord of the invisible World, having Angelical Officers under him, who, as ministering Spirits, were always ready to attend his Call, and obey his Command; and therefore that he might dispatch one of these invisible Messengers to perform the Cure he desired, without giving himself the Trouble of coming in Person. This I observed is the plainest and clearest Interpretation of the Words of the Centurion, as applied to *Christ* — *Speak the Word, and my Servant shall be healed: For I also am a Man set under Authority, and I say to one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my Servant, Do this, and he doth it.* Secondly, That our Lord, during his Ministry, shewed always a greater Regard to Men's Faith, than to their Works, I proved from plain unquestionable Matter of Fact, or some clear undeniable Instances, in the Beginning of this and of the next Chapter, and more particularly

larly from the Case of the Centurion; which is so full and clear to that Purpose. And now I come, in the

Third Place, to consider the Reasons that are to be assigned for our Saviour's Acting in this Manner. And (1.) one Reason that may be urged for our Lord's insisting so very much, and laying so great a Stress upon Faith, and being ready to reward it in whomsoever he found it, is to take Men off from all vain Thoughts and Pretences to any Merit or Desert in themselves, and to make them entirely depend upon him for all that is righteous and good in them. Our Saviour takes the same Method now to cure the Souls of Men, as he did formerly to cure their Bodies. In both Cases the Persons, that are to be relieved, must be sensible in the first Place, that they are not able, by any Skill or Power of their own, to relieve themselves. In the next Place, they must be fully satisfied and persuaded, that *Christ* is the great Physician of Soul and Body, and both able and willing to do for them whatever their Case may require, and even abundantly more than either they can ask or think. And then this Belief and Persuasion will necessarily incline and even
compel

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compel them to make earnest Applications to him for Succour and Relief: And if they do, they have not the least Reason to doubt of Success, provided only that they observe the Directions which he gives, and comply with the Remedies which he prescribes. Now here we may easily and plainly perceive, that all is to be resolved into Faith; that Faith is the Beginner and Finisher of the Whole, as it puts us upon the Use of the right Means, makes us seek for Relief where only it can be had, and animates and encourages us with the sure and certain Hope of Success. And therefore we find, that according to the Nature, Measure, and Degree of Men's Faith, so he constantly gratified their Request, or perform'd what they desired of him. Faith was the whole and only Thing he demanded or insisted upon: But without this they could expect no Favour or Mercy. But where he perceived that Men had Faith to be healed, he sometimes prevented their very Wishes and Prayers, and bestowed the Blessing without their asking. A few Instances will make this Matter clear; and some of these we have in this and the next Chapter. At the Beginning of this we read, that *when he was come down*

66 *The Preheminence of* Ser. 4.

from the Mountain, behold, there came a Leper, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou can'st make me clean. The Leper, you see, was fully persuaded of our Saviour's *Power*, nor perhaps did he question his *Inclination*: For tho' he says, *Lord, if thou wilt*, yet That rather seems to imply a Sense of his own Unworthiness, than the Want of Will or Readiness in *Christ*. As if he had said, Lord, I acknowledge and trust in thy Almighty Power; but have Reason to question, whether you will be inclined to shew Mercy to so undeserving an Object. And it was this Humility, joined with his Faith, that inforced and gave Success to his Petition. For presently thereupon *Jesus put forth his Hand, and touched him, saying, I will, be thou clean, q. d.* You see my Readiness, and shall feel my Power. *And immediately his Leprosy was cleansed.* Another Instance we have in the Beginning of the next Chapter, where 'tis said — *And, behold, they brought unto him a Man sick of the Palsy, lying on a Bed; and Jesus seeing their Faith, said unto the Sick of the Palsy, Son, be of good Cheer, thy Sins be forgiven thee.* Here we see that it was their Faith only
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Ser. 4. *Faith above Works.* 67

that was regarded by *Christ*, and that, upon observing this, he immediately pronounced the Paralytick absolved from his Sins. But the *Jews* would not believe that he had Power to forgive Sins, and thought he had spoken Blasphemy. But *Jesus*, to let them know that he understood their Thoughts, said unto them, *Wherefore think ye Evil in your Hearts?* And then to satisfy them, that he had Power to remove the Effect, as well as to remove the Cause, he asked them, *Whether is easier to say, thy Sins be forgiven thee? Or to say, arise, and walk?* And then to convince them that he had not spoken Blasphemy (for God will not enable a Blasphemer to work Miracles) *he said to the Sick of the Palsy, Arise, take up thy Bed, and go unto thine House. And he arose, and departed to his House.* Now here Forgiveness of Sins, and Recovery from a dead Palsy, are conferred upon one and the same Man, on Account of a strong Faith. But where Men's Faith was weaker and more languid, there our Saviour shew'd less Inclination, and did with more Difficulty perform the Cure.

— *When a certain Nobleman, whose Son was sick at Capernaum, heard that Jesus was*

68 *The Prebeminence of* Ser. 4.

come out of Judea into Galilee, he went unto him, and besought him, that he would come down and heal his Son; for he was at the Point of Death. Then said Jesus unto him, *Except ye see Signs and Wonders, ye will not believe.* This was a rougher Kind of Answer than our Saviour usually gave to those that had requested any Favour of him. The Reason might be, because he addressed him with little Faith, and less Humility. Our Lord took notice only of his Want of Faith; but that he was wanting in *Respect* likewise, as having no just Notion of the Dignity and Divinity of the Person he addressed to, is plain from his Answer in the next Words — *Sir, come down ere my Child die*; which seems to be spoken in a Stile of Command, rather than in the humble Language of a Petitioner. However, our Saviour's great Condescension in granting his Request wrought in this Nobleman that Faith, at last, which he wanted before, or raised it to an higher Pitch. — *Jesus saith unto him, Go thy Way; thy Son liveth.* And the Man believed the Word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his Way. And at his Return, finding his Son recovered at the very Hour that Jesus had

Ser. 4. *Faith above Works.* 69

had spoken those Words, *himself believed, and his whole House.* It was likewise with some Difficulty that our Lord was prevailed upon to heal the Son of another Man that came to him with less Faith than this Nobleman. We have the Account in the ninth Chapter of *St. Mark.* After a full Relation of the miserable Case of this Child, the Man cries out — *If thou can'st do any thing, have Compassion on us and help us.* — *If thou can'st do any thing;* as if he distrusted the Power of him, whose Aid he implored; which Diffidence, or Defect in Faith, is thus gently corrected by our Lord in the following Words — *If thou can'st believe, all Things are possible to him that believeth.* And straightway the Father of the Child cried out, and said with Tears, *Lord, I believe, help thou mine Unbelief.* Upon this humble Profession and Petition, the merciful *Jesus* was prevailed with to cure the Child, tho' not without the Appearance of some Difficulty to the very last. For the dumb and deaf Spirit, that was dispossessed, rent him sore at departing, and left him as one dead. When our Lord perceived any to believe in him, but with a Mixture of some Ignorance, Error, or Preju-

dice, he endeavoured to remove the Obstacle, and to strengthen their Faith, by some seasonable Encouragement or Exhortation. The Woman that had *an Issue of Blood twelve Years*, and *came behind him in the Press*, had Faith enough to believe, that if she could but touch the Hem of his Garment, she should be healed of her Plague: But she was not arrived to such a Degree of Faith, as to be assured, that she could not attempt to do this Thing without his Knowledge of it. And therefore when he turned about, and inquired who it was that had touched him, she was under some Trembling and Consternation; and when she now first perceived that she could not be hid, she freely confessed what she had done; and thereupon was dismissed with these comforting Words——
Daughter, thy Faith hath made thee whole; go in Peace, and be whole of thy Plague. At the same time our Lord was going to the House of *Jairus*, one of the Rulers of the Synagogue, in order to cure his Daughter then lying at the Point of Death. The Father was fully persuaded that, upon *Christ's* laying his Hands upon her, she should live. But when he was told by some on his Return home,

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home, that his Daughter was actually dead, his Faith was at a stand, and he had nothing farther to ask. For tho' he believed our Saviour's Power to *recover the Sick*, he had no Notion or Belief of any Power in him to *raise the Dead*; this being the first Instance of this Kind that had happened. Therefore, to remove his Diffidence, and to encourage his Faith, our Saviour said unto him, *Be not afraid, only believe.* Fortified with these encouraging Words, he attended our Lord into the Room where his Daughter lay, and humbly waited the Event; which so far exceeded all that he could ask or hope for, that 'tis said that they were *astonished with a great Astonishment.*

Now from these several Instances it is evident, beyond Dispute, that our Saviour did not so much consider the *Merits* or *Characters* of Persons that came to him for Relief, as their *Faith*; according to the Strength or Weakness of which he was always more or less inclined to grant their Requests. Had he taken the other Method, and dealt out his Mercies and Miracles according to Men's good Works, or seeming Deserts, this might not only have given Occasion to a great deal

of Pride, Murmuring, and Discontent, and to fierce Emulation and Contention, but would likewise have left the Matter still in a State of some Doubt and Uncertainty; for no one, in this Case, could certainly have known whether he was worthy or not. But here he left every Man to be his own Judge in the Case; for every one must know whether he believed in *Christ* or not, and be ready to answer this plain Question of his—*Believest thou that I am able to do this?* And according to his Belief, so it was done unto him. And without such a Belief, in a higher or lower Degree, 'tis not to be supposed that any one would have applied to him for Relief; so that their very Coming was an Argument and Token of their Faith. Now this Method took away all Pretence to Merit, and rested the Matter wholly upon Mercy and Grace. By the other way, Men would have taken the Honour of what was done for them to themselves, and esteemed it no other than the Effect of their own Deservings; whereas *Faith*, which respects only the Divine Power and Goodness, gives all the Praise and Glory to God. And accordingly we may observe in the Case of the Centurion, that

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that it was not the Recommendation of his Friends, who represented him as *worthy*, for whom *Christ* should do this, but his own humble Faith that procured him the speediest Answer, and the readiest Relief. But our Saviour did not only take this Course with respect to Men's Bodies, but in regard likewise of the far more important Concerns of their Souls. In both Cases, *Faith* is the great and necessary Condition more particularly insisted upon; only with this Difference, that whereas a small Degree of Faith, in Comparison, was often sufficient to incline the compassionate *Jesus* to extend his Mercy to the Sick and Diseased, nothing less than a strong and vigorous Faith, *a Faith that worketh by Love*, and that brings forth the Fruit of good Living, will be effectual to the procuring of Pardon and Salvation. Our Belief therefore of his Power and Readiness, and Promise to help us in all the Needs and Concerns of our Souls, is the first and great Condition and Qualification required of us, in order to the obtaining his Favour, and to be fulfilled with his Grace and heavenly Benediction.

Secondly,

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Secondly, Another End and Design of our Saviour's so much regarding, and so much insisting on Men's Faith, seems to have been, in order to supply the Defect of their Righteousness, by directing them to trust wholly to him, and not to themselves. Now here I don't consider Faith as separate from good Works; they must both stand together, and one without the other is vain and ineffectual. But then I observe that our Dependance is not upon *Works*, but upon *Faith*; from whence all good Works proceed, and by which they are render'd acceptable to God. For *without Faith 'tis impossible to please him*. But there is no Dependance upon good Works, considered barely in themselves, because the very best of them are, more or less, defective and imperfect, because they have some Mixture of Sin and Corruption, because they are not sufficient (even supposing them perfect in their Kind) to make Atonement for one single wilful Offence, or to entitle us to a Reward, and much less to a Reward so vastly disproportionate as that of eternal Life: Nor can they stand the Test of a strict Examination, or abide the Severity of God's Inquisition. Nor is our Repentance itself what

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Ser. 4. *Faith above Works.* 75

we can absolutely depend upon, since there are many Sins or Aggravations of Sin, which may have escaped our Memory or Observation; and those that we have repented of may not have been repented of with that Zeal, Earnestness, and Contrition, with which they might and ought to have been. What then is to be done in this Case? Or what can we safely depend upon? Why, here we must fly to *Faith* as our last Refuge, and there we shall find a sure Refuge. For if, after our weak but sincere Endeavours, we firmly believe that *Christ* fulfilled all Righteousness, in order to supply the Defects of ours, and that he performed the whole Law of God, that we might have a Title to eternal Life; and if we likewise firmly believe that he made a full and perfect Atonement and Satisfaction for all our Sins, known and unknown, we have then nothing to disturb us, either on Account of Sins that have been forsaken, or quite forgotten, or on the Score of Infirmary or Imperfection, that is not wilfully indulged or retained; but may rest assured, that, in Consideration of such our Belief, we shall be accepted and accounted as righteous before God, and for the Sake of *Christ* be hereafter received

received and rewarded by him, as if we had never offended him. Here then is a firm Ground of Confidence, a sure Foundation for our Souls to rest upon. But,

Thirdly, Another Reason why our blessed Saviour so strictly requires our Faith, is, because this is not only necessary to supply the Defects of our Righteousness and Repentance, but to work that Righteousness and Repentance in us. 'Tis a great Thing, I confess, to be *truly good*; greater than all Faith and all Knowledge, considered separate or a-part; yea, the greatest Perfection that human Nature is capable of; far exceeding all other Endowments and Attainments whatsoever, beyond the Gift of Prophecy, or the Power of working Miracles, or understanding the most abstruse and sublimest Mysteries. For Goodness is the Impress of the Divine Pattern renewed upon the Souls of Men, which makes them like unto Angels, yea, like unto God himself; and therefore by partaking of his *Holiness*, they are said to partake of the *Divine Nature*. But then this Goodness is attainable only by the Help of Grace, and the Exercise of a lively Faith, which is the Root and Foundation of all Virtue; and 'tis the

Root

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Root which produces the Branches, and not the Branches the Root. We need not doubt of a sincere Obedience, provided only we are endued with a strong and vigorous Faith, that is duly exercised and employed. For is it to be imagined, for Instance, that Men can often think and meditate on the Days of Eternity, on the Joys of Heaven, and the Pains of Hell; on the Shortness and Uncertainty of this Life, and the Vanity and Emptiness of all Things under the Sun, in Comparison of that unspeakable Felicity, and that exceeding and eternal Weight of Glory reserved in Heaven for them; on the Wages of Sin, and the Rewards of Virtue; on the Divine Attributes and Perfections; on the Immortality of the Soul, the Resurrection of the Body, and the amazing Concerns of the other World; on the tender Mercy of God towards Mankind, and the infinitive Love and Condescension of his Son to such unworthy Objects and sinful Creatures; can we, I say, suppose that Men can seriously believe, and frequently and duly consider such Things as they ought, and not be powerfully and continually excited to Works of Repentance and Obedience? But if they very seldom think on these Things,

or

or apply them to themselves, or consider their own near Concern in them, or exercise their Faith upon them: If they only now and then bestow a few cold, transient, and superficial Thoughts upon these great Objects of Faith, no wonder if they continue barren and unfruitful in all the Works of Piety and Righteousness. For according to Men's Faith, so will their Lives be. If this be sound and strong, it will necessarily produce a suitable Practice: But if this be weak and languishing, for Want of Care and Exercise, the Consequence will be a partial Performance of some Duties, and a total Neglect of others, and a general Indifference and Disregard to the Life and Spirit of practical Religion. To aim at Goodness, or any Progress in Virtue, without the Aids and Supports of Faith, is, in our Saviour's Comparison, like Building a House upon the Sand: And the Success will prove accordingly. Such Building may endure for a little Time, and make a fair and flourishing Appearance; but when the Rains descend, and the Floods come and beat upon this Building, no wonder if it presently give way, or sink upon the Approach of Opposition and Danger.

Fourthly,

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Fourthly, The last Reason I shall now offer for our Saviour's shewing so great a Regard to Faith, is because it is this that must render all our religious Performances acceptable to God. Faith itself must be sanctified by an Act of Faith. We must believe that Faith will find Access and Acceptance at the Throne of Grace, and that our best Works, without this, will be rejected. When we *have done all that 'tis our Duty to do*, we are still to say, that *we are unprofitable Servants*. But who is there that can say, that *he has done all that it was his Duty to do*? And if those, who can't charge themselves with any wilful Failing or Transgression (if any such could be supposed in the present State of Corruption) are to have such low and mean Opinion of themselves and their Performances, what Thoughts ought *we* to entertain of ourselves, who have been wanting in so many Instances of Duty, and guilty of so many great Violations of it? The Consideration of our own Unworthiness, and of the Poorness and Unprofitableness of our best Services with respect to God, would be apt to sink us into Despair, did not our *Faith* assure us that they are sanctified by the Mediation of *Christ*, and
render'd

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render'd acceptable to God thro' his Merits and Intercession. 'Tis this that comforts and confirms our Souls, and both encourages and enables us to a patient Continuance in well-doing. *Faith* is our only Relief under a Sense of our manifold Defects in Duty and Devotion, and that which must consecrate our very best Performances. *Cain* and *Abel*, as we read, both offered Sacrifice to God. But the Sacrifice of the one found Acceptance, while the other's was rejected: The Reason is, because the one's was offered by Faith, the other's not. For so *St. Paul* affirms—*By Faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent Sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained Witness that he was righteous.* Both agreed in paying this Homage and Acknowledgment to God, as their Maker. But they differed in the Manner or Intention of paying it; and it was the Difference of their *Faith*, and not the Difference of the *material Sacrifice*, that made the great Distinction between them. This will farther appear, if we consider the Case of the penitent Thief on the Cross; in which we may observe, that That which more particularly recommended him to our Saviour's Compassion, and procured

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cured him that gracious Promise — *To Day shalt thou be with me in Paradise*, was the Strength of his Faith and Hope in *Christ*, as the promised *Messiah*. 'Tis true, he was *penitent* at the same time; he acknowledged the Justness of his Punishment, accused himself, and vindicated his Saviour, in Answer to the Railings of his Fellow-sufferer. — *Dost thou not fear God, seeing thou art in the same Condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due Reward of our Deeds; but this Man hath done nothing amiss.* But then it was his earnest Application to *Christ* himself, in the following Words (that are so fully expressive of a rigorous and lively Faith) — — *Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy Kingdom*, that render'd him an Object of Mercy, and a Pattern to all them that should hereafter believe. We may therefore justly conclude, that this dying Sinner was saved by Faith, and not by Works; or that his late Repentance was render'd effectual and available to Salvation, by Means of an eminent and distinguishing Faith, which prompted him to confess with his Mouth what he believed in his Heart, that the Person then suffering with him in that ignominious Manner,

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was no other than the true *Messiah*, and Lord of the invifible World. Thefe two Inftances may be fufficient to prove that 'tis *Faith* which renders both our Repentance and our religious Services acceptable to God. 'Tis Faith indeed which makes us draw near unto him: *For he that cometh to God muft believe that he is, and that he is a Rewarder of them that diligently feek him.* 'Tis Faith that purifies and prepares the Heart for all the Offices of our holy Religion, and enables us to wait with Patience for a Return of our Prayers: For, as the Prophet fpeaks, *he that believeth will not make hafte.* 'Tis Faith that makes the Preaching of the Word profitable to thofe that hear it, and effectual to the End for which it was ordained. Upon this St. *Paul* lays the whole Strefs of the Matter. *For unto us, fays he, was the Gofpel preached, as well as unto them; but the Word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with Faith in them that heard it.* And, *Laftly*, 'tis Faith that is diftinctly and exprefly required in order to a due Participation of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. When our Lord exhorted the *Jews* in the fixth of St. *John*, *not to labour for the Meat that perifbeth,*
but

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but for that Meat which endureth unto everlasting Life; they said unto him, *What shall we do that we may work the Works of God?* Jesus answered and said unto them, *This is the Work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.* From which last Words we may observe, that good Works are so far from being preferable to a saving Faith, that the great Work of all is to believe aright in *Christ*. And what we are to believe more particularly in Reference to him, our Lord has shewn us in the following Part of that Chapter, *namely*, that he was the *Bread that came down from Heaven*, that the Bread which he would give was *his Flesh*, which he would give for the *Life of the World*; that except they eat the *Flesh of the Son of God*, and drank his Blood, they had *no Life in them*: That his *Flesh is Meat indeed*, and his *Blood is drink indeed*: And that *whoſo eateth his Flesh* (in the Way of his Appointment) *and drinketh his Blood*, should have *eternal Life*, and he would *raise him up at the last Day*. All this, every Christian that desires to partake of the Benefit of *Christ's* Death and Passion, by partaking of the holy Communion, is bound to believe: That is, he is firmly and without all

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doubt to believe what *Christ* has here solemnly asserted concerning the eating his Flesh and drinking his Blood, tho' he has no Notion or Apprehension, and can no way possibly conceive how Bread and Wine can be a Means of conveying Life and Nourishment to the Soul; or how the Virtue and Efficacy of *Christ's* Body and Blood, as the great Sacrifice and Atonement for Sin, can be communicated to him, by his partaking of outward and visible Signs. But this is no Part of his Faith: He is not obliged to believe *how* or in what Manner this may be done: He is only to believe the Truth and Reality of the Thing itself upon the bare Assertion of *Christ*; who is pleased to put this Test upon all his Followers, to try the Humility and Obedience of their Faith, or to see whether they will believe his bare Word in a Matter that so nearly concerns their Salvation, and so far exceeds the Bounds of their Comprehension. And if they do sincerely and firmly believe it, they may be as sure of succeeding in their pious Endeavours, and of partaking of all the Benefits of his Death and Passion, as if they actually heard him say unto them, as he usually did to those he cured of bodily Infirmities



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firmities——*Thy Faith hath saved thee, go
in Peace.*

*Now to God the FATHER, God the SON,
and God the HOLY GHOST, Three Per-
sons and One GOD, be ascribed, as is
most due, all Honour and Glory, and
Praise, Might, Majesty, Obedience, and
Thanksgiving, now, henceforth, and for
evermore. Amen.*

S E R M O N V.

The Fear of G O D, the great Preservative against Sin.

PROV. xvi. *latter Part of ver. 6.*

By the Fear of the Lord Men depart from Evil.

THE *Fear of the Lord* is often in Scripture put for Religion in general, or for the Worship of God in particular ; but here the Words seem to be taken precisely for that Fear of God, which is one of the great Principles of Holiness, and which is elsewhere called the *Beginning of Wisdom*, as it lays the Foundation of a virtuous Practice. For *Fear* is a Passion that puts a Check and Restraint upon us ; and the *greater* the Object is that is feared, the *more powerful* will be that Restraint. Upon which
Account

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Account the *Fear of God*, who is the supreme Being, the great Law-giver and Judge, able to save and to destroy, must, when this Fear has taken Possession of the Heart, have a strong and prevailing Influence over the Minds and Manners of Mankind. Indeed the several Passions which God has planted in the Soul of Man, were all originally designed for excellent Ends and Purposes; tho' now generally perverted and misapplied, thro' the Depravity and Corruption of human Nature. Thus the Passion of *Love* was given us, that it might constantly be directed to, and principally employed about the chief Good. *Fear* was implanted in us, as the Guard and Centinel of the Soul, to give Warning of the first Approaches of Danger, and to keep us from offending our Maker and Judge. The Passion of *Joy* was bestowed upon us, that we might delight ourselves greatly in God, and be more sensibly affected with, and more eagerly desirous of, that *Fulness of Joy* that is reserved for us in Heaven. *Grief* or *Sorrow* is likewise interwoven in our very Frame and Constitution, that so we might be able to make some small Atonement for past Offences, and bewail the sad Effects of Guilt and Sin, both

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in ourselves and others. And even those turbulent and unruly Passions, *Anger, Hatred,* and *a Desire of Revenge*, were planted in us at first with a merciful Intention, and for our greater Security, that we might more zealously abhor and avoid every thing that is evil; but are now chiefly to be employ'd against *ourselves*, who are our own worst Enemies, and from whence our greatest Dangers do now arise. From this short Account of the Nature and Tendency of the Passions, we may perceive, that the Passion of *Fear*, which, when once let loose, is at present perhaps the most rapid and boundless of all the Passions, if duly and constantly fixed on the right Object, would not fail to produce most happy and wonderful Effects in the Hearts and Lives of all those that profess themselves the Servants of God: For the Furthering and Promoting which End, I propose to explain this great Principle of a holy Life in the following Manner. (1.) I shall consider what the Fear of the Lord does properly import. (2.) That this Fear of the Lord will teach us how to avoid the Evil of Sin, or to depart from Iniquity. And (3.) As an Inference or Consequence of this, I shall observe, that the only
sure

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sure Sign of having the Fear of God, is to depart from or cease to do Evil.

As to the *First*, The *Fear of the Lord* implies an awful Sense and serious Consideration of the Greatness and Majesty of Almighty God, of his infinite Power, Justice, and Holiness, and other Attributes and Perfections: I say, *an awful Sense and serious Consideration* of the Divine Attributes. For 'tis not enough to know and believe in general, that God is holy and just, and powerful, and the like. All this we may know and believe, and yet not truly fear him. The Character which the Psalmist gives of the Wicked, is, that they *forget God*, and that *God is not in all their Thoughts*. They don't deny his Being, or disbelieve his Power and Justice; but they don't seriously remember him, or duly think upon him, or consider what he is in himself, or with respect to them; and therefore have no lasting Fear or Dread of him upon their Minds. For no Man can be said to *fear* what he seldom or never thinks of with any Seriousness or Attention: And therefore tho' God is by infinite Degrees, or beyond all Comparison, the justest and greatest Object of Fear, yet to our Shame be it said,
there

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there is not a trifling Evil in this World, but is commonly more dreaded than the great God of Heaven and Earth. And this for want of considering *who* God is, how near he is to every one of us, that *in him we live and move, and have our Being*; that we are dependent upon him for all that we have or are, yea, that we can't offend him without abusing those Powers we derive from him; that he is present in every Place, that he sees all that is done, hears all that is spoken, knows at once all the Thoughts of all Mankind; takes particular Notice of every one here present, is privy to their most secret Imaginations, and understandeth their Desires long before; that his Justice is most tremendous and adorable, and his Power invincible and irresistible; that his Greatness and Majesty are so inconceivably awful, and so dreadfully glorious, that the very Angels, who never sinned, are represented as covering their Faces, and falling down and trembling before the Throne of his Glory. Now if we would accustom ourselves to such reverential Thoughts of God as these, and often represent him to our Minds as the great Controller of all Things in Heaven and Earth, as the righteous Judge

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Judge of Men and Angels, as the constant Inspector of human Affairs, as the only Searcher of Hearts, as that Almighty Being, to whom we are so nearly related, on whom our All depends, and to whom we must give an Account: This, by Degrees, would create in us such an awful Regard for the Divine Majesty, that, with such a Sense of God upon our Minds, we could not dare to affront him by Irreverence, or provoke him by Profaneness, or offend him by Sins of Wilfulness and Presumption. For *by the Fear of the Lord Men depart from Evil.* The Truth and Meaning of which Divine Proposition, I come now,

In the *Second* Place, To confirm and explain: In order to which I observe, that the four great Springs or Principles of human Action are *Faith, Fear, Hope, and Love.* We act according as we *believe.* We avoid as much as possibly we can, whatever we *fear* and dread; and we seek and pursue what we *love* and *hope* for. Now *the Fear of the Lord*, which is the *second* great Principle of a holy Life, proceeds from and is founded upon *Faith.* For we must believe that *God is*, and believe *what* he is, both in himself, and with respect

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respect to us, before we can either *love* or *fear* him as we ought. Therefore it is, that *Faith* is so particularly and indispensably required of us, throughout the whole New Testament, as the Foundation of all Christian Practice. The next to this is the *Fear of God*, by which we learn and are enabled to *depart from Evil*. And were it not for this Restraint of the Fear of God, and that other Restraint of an over-ruling Providence, the World would be much wickedder than it is. For tho' *the Fear of God* is not always so prevalent and effectual as to keep Men from *all Manner* of Sin and Wickedness; yet it prevails so far with most Men, at some Times at least, and on some Occasions, as to hinder them from *many* Sins they might otherwise commit. And it would be as prevailing and effectual at all other Times, and on all other Occasions, if it had once taken full Possession of the Heart, and were but duly and constantly attended to, as that religious Principle, by which we are to govern and conduct ourselves, in all the Affairs and Concerns of this Life. For he that fears God, as he ought, will be cautious of offending him in any Respect, and truly sorry at any time he happens to offend. He will not
content

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content himself with a bare superficial Knowledge of his Duty, or hastily follow the general Opinions and Customs of the World, (which are often contrary to the Doctrines and Precepts of the Gospel) but be careful to find out and understand *what is the good and acceptable and perfect Will of God*; and endeavour to conform himself thereto, as far as his present State and Circumstances will allow. More particularly the Fear of God will restrain all sinful Irregularities in Thought, Word, or Deed. He that is govern'd by this Principle will be as cautious of what he thinks, and what he speaks, as of his outward Actions. For as the having an Eye and Regard to God, as the Observer and Rewarder of what we do, is the principal Thing, next to the Merits and Intercession of our Saviour *Christ*, that renders our mean Services and Performances acceptable to him; so 'tis the having the same Regard to him, as the great Governour of the World, as the Searcher of Hearts, and Judge of all Men, that must keep us from thinking, saying, or doing any thing that we know is offensive and displeasing to him. For Instance, he that considers and dreads the Severity of God's *Justice*, will be
cautious

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cautious of arming that tremendous Attribute against himself. And he that *regards the Power of his Wrath*, will not be forward to kindle it, nor backward in his Endeavours to pacify it when it is kindled. And he that trembles at the Thoughts of appearing before a God of infinite *Purity and Perfection*, will use his best Endeavours to cleanse himself *from all Filthiness of Flesh and Spirit, perfecting Holiness in the Fear of God*. And if we take a View of the rest of the Divine Attributes, we shall find that each of them, even the Mercy and Goodness of God, is full of Reasons and Arguments to dissuade and deter us from the Ways of Vice, and to make us *depart from Evil*. And as the Fear of the Lord is most reasonable in itself, and most likely to keep us within the Bounds of Duty; so is it no real Abridgment of our Christian Liberty, or inconsistent with true Joy and Comfort. For *the Fear of God* restrains us only from Things hurtful and pernicious, from ruining and undoing ourselves, from affronting our Judge, provoking our heavenly Benefactor, and incurring the just Vengeance of an angry God. The *Service* of this Master is *true Freedom*; while the *Freedom* which
some

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some affect is no better than *Slavery*. For the Libertine and the Dissolute, the Ungodly and the Sinner, are all Slaves; Slaves to the most oppressive Tyranny of their own unruly Wills, Affections, and Passions, from which nothing can set them free, but *the Fear of God*. And tho' this Fear of God will at first, or for some Time, torment them with it's Discipline, and for the present be *not joyous, but grievous; yet afterwards it will yield the peaceable Fruit of Righteousness to them that are exercised thereby*, and fill them with Joy unspeakable and solid Comfort. Having thus considered what the Fear of the Lord does properly import, and how it tends to free and secure us from the Guilt and Dominion of Sin, I shall now,

In the *Third* and last Place, Observe, as an Inference or Consequence from what has been said, that the only sure Sign of having the Fear of God is *departing from Evil*. There is hardly perhaps a Man living, but *professes* to fear God; and it would appear horrid and monstrous for any to declare that he did not. But there are but few, in Comparison of those that make this Profession, who can be truly said to fear him as they ought;

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ought ; no more of them indeed, than those who so fear him, as not wilfully and presumptuously to offend him. For if we don't fear to *offend* God, 'tis plain that we don't fear him as we ought ; and if we *do* those Things that we *know* to be provoking or displeasing to him, 'tis as plain that we don't *fear* to offend him. I speak of such Things as are done deliberately, willingly, and presumptuously. For a Man that truly fears God, may happen to offend through Ignorance, Inadvertency, or Surprise ; but then he no sooner perceives, or is made sensible of his Error, but he repents of it, and takes care to walk more warily and circumspectly for the Time to come. But on the contrary, if Men take little or no Heed to their Ways, and are rash and presumptuous in their Doings, tho' they may not be altogether *void* of the Fear of God, yet they can't be said to be *govern'd* by this religious Principle ; which is then only effectual and apparent, when it makes Men cautious and considerate ; when they act and undertake nothing of Moment, but what they can answer to God and themselves ; when they abstain not only from open Enormities, but even, as much as in them lies, from the
very

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very Appearance of Evil. Whoever acts and behaves in this Manner, may assure himself, that he has the Fear of God ruling in his Heart. But to pretend to *fear God*, and at the same Time *not to fear to do Evil*, is an Absurdity in Principle as well as in Practice. No Man can be said to *fear* what he is not careful to *avoid*. If we really fear the Anger and Displeasure of Almighty God, we must necessarily fear to do those Things which we are sure will provoke his Anger and Displeasure against us. If we fear'd the *Effect*, we should certainly fear the *Cause*. If we had a just Dread of the Evil of Punishment, we should dread and avoid the Evil of Sin; which is the only Thing that God hates, the only Thing with which he is displeased, and that which he has threaten'd with no less than an eternal Vengeance. If we are possessed with an habitual Fear of God, this will manifest itself on all proper Occasions, and be a Check and Restraint, not only on the outward Acts of Sin, but upon the first Motions of the Mind, and upon wicked Suggestions and evil Thoughts; and so stop the first Rise and Beginnings of Sin, which is our best Defence against its fatal Effects, and the surest and easiest Me-

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thod we can take to preserve our Innocence, and secure our standing. If therefore we would satisfy ourselves and others, that we are influenced and govern'd by a Principle of religious Fear, we must watch over our Thoughts, and stand in awe of God, when we are alone; we must watch over our Words, that we offend not in our Tongue; and over our Actions, that we may be withheld from sinning against him. This is the only sure Token and Testimony of a filial and reverential Fear of God. And in order to work this Fear in us, the Scripture abounds with a great Variety of the strongest and most lively Representations of the Power, Wisdom, Justice, Holiness, and other Attributes and Perfections of the Deity. And God himself has revealed his Wrath from Heaven, and publish'd the severest Threatnings to the World, that Men might stand in fear of him; and to the same End, he has caused more particularly to be recorded in the Gospel the amazing Sufferings of his own Son, when he undertook the Office of Mediator between God and Men, that so in these Sufferings we might see and acknowledge God's Love to Sinners and Hatred of Sin, and learn from thence how severely he punishes
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the Violation of his righteous Laws, when he punishes it as it deserves. But of these Particulars a few Words more may be proper, and a few will be sufficient. Those awful Attributes then of God, his Power, Justice, and Holiness, if seriously attended to, will strike every Soul with a religious Dread. For who knoweth the Power of his Wrath? And who knoweth the Extent of his Power? Who can stand in his Sight when he is angry? And when he enters into Judgment, what Man can hope to be justified? Who can reflect on his unspotted Purity, his infinite Hatred of Sin, his Power to punish Sinners, the Vengeance he has prepared for the Ungodly, the Executions of his Judgments upon the old World, and his woeful Threatnings and Denunciations against the Obstinate and Impenitent, and not be afraid to offend? Who can consider the unmeasurable Guilt and Demerits of Sin, which required an Atonement of such infinite Value, or the fiery Strictness and Severity of the Divine Justice, as display'd more particularly in the Sufferings of the only begotten Son of God, when he stood in the Place of Sinners, and God exacted of him a full Satisfaction to his offended Deity, for all

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the Branches of his Laws, and the Contempt of his Authority; and not be induced thereby to work out his Salvation with Fear and Trembling? Or who can think on the amazing Terroures of the last Day, and that Inundation of Divine Wrath, that will then seize and overwhelm Sinners, and not stand in awe of the righteous Judge, of a holy, all-powerful, and avenging God? And what a dreadful Aggravation of their Punishment will it be, to be condemn'd by that Hand which was so mighty to save, and to be sentenced by that very Person to everlasting Perdition, who had laid down his Life for their Redemption? Our Fears, which are apt to betray the Succours of Reason, and to exceed their Bounds, when let loose upon other Objects, will, in their highest Degree, and in their utmost Extent, be found but reasonable and just in the Wicked, when fix'd and terminated upon God. For *according to their Fear*, as the Psalmist observes, *so is his Wrath*. Let their Fears be seemingly never so extravagant, they can never reach the Fulness of God's Vengeance, or equal the Extremity of his Displeasure; since what they are to *feel* will vastly exceed whatever they could possibly
fear

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fear or apprehend before-hand. But there is a Fear that is more kindly and auspicious, a filial and reverential Fear of God; a Fear that is temper'd with Gratitude, and directed by Love, more cautious of offending, and less apprehensive of Punishment; a Fear that is Part of the Duty we owe our Creator; a Fear of his glorious Name and tremendous Majesty, at which Angels bow, and Devils tremble; a Fear of abusing the Riches of God's Goodness towards us, of slighting and despising the most astonishing Instance of Kindness that ever was or ever can be shewn to sinful Mortals; of behaving undutifully and unthankfully towards our heavenly Benefactor, of neglecting the Service of the most bountiful Master, of spurning at the Bowels of the most tender and indulgent Father, of lightly regarding the infinite Mercy and Condescension of our ever-blessed Redeemer, of grieving and resisting our Divine Comforter; and, in a Word, a Fear of converting the Patience, Forbearance, and Long-suffering of God, into a Fury implacable and insupportable. Such a Fear as this will keep Men from *committing* Evil, as the other will teach them to *depart* from the Evil they

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have committed. And since God has taken so much Care and Pains, as it were, to instruct us in the Knowledge of himself, and to imprint his Fear upon our Minds; surely we are obliged to take some Pains ourselves to attain this religious Principle, which is the Beginning of all Virtue, and of all Wisdom; that so we may serve God acceptably for the future, and, as *Moses* told the *Israelites*, learn to *fear this glorious and fearful Name, the Lord our God*; which will be found an excellent Means to influence and regulate our whole Conduct, and to render our *Conversation as becometh the Gospel of Christ*; to fit us for all the Offices of our holy Religion, and the several Duties of our Station; to arm us against all the Dangers and Terroures of this World, and to prepare us for those unspeakable Joys and Glories that are reserv'd for us in the World to come.

Which God, of his infinite Mercy, grant for Jesus Christ's Sake, to whom, with the FATHER and the HOLY GHOST, be ascribed, as is most due, all Honour and Glory, Adoration and Thanksgiving, now and for evermore. Amen.

SERMON

SERMON VI.

The Nature, Grounds, and Effects
of Christian Hope.

I JOHN iii. 3.

*And every Man that hath this Hope
in him, purifies himself even as
he is pure.*

AS in the common Affairs of civil Life there must be some Spur and Incentive to excite Men's Industry, to carry them out to Action, and to keep them always usefully employ'd; so in the great Duties of Religion, and the practical Parts of Christianity, there are Grounds and Principles, upon which a holy Life and the whole Fabrick of Christian Morality is to be founded. The chief of these are *Faith, Fear, Hope, and Love*; which are both eminent Virtues and

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Graces in themselves, and the Foundation of all other. For we *act* according as we *believe*; we *avoid* as much as we can whatever we *fear* and dread; and we *seek* and pursue whatever we *love* and *hope for*. Two of these great Principles of Holiness I have consider'd in some late Discourses. What is now to be consider'd, is That of *Hope*; which, in one respect, goes before the Love of God, and, in another, follows after. It *follows after*, as 'tis the Effect and Consequence of Love, as being directly and immediately founded upon it. For unless we first *love* God, we can't *hope* or desire to enjoy him. It *goes before*, or is succeeded by *Love*, because *Love* is more permanent and lasting, and will go along with us into the other World, and make up a great Part of our Happiness there: Whereas *Hope* must be left behind, or rather will be swallow'd up, as *Faith* will likewise, in the Beatifick Vision of God. So that from hence it appears, that the *Love of God* is the only Christian Principle that is subject to no Decay. For, "when constant *Faith* shall be rewarded
" with a happy Certainty, and holy *Hope*
" be crown'd with eternal Joy, triumphant
" *Charity*,

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“ *Charity*, the greatest of the three, shall
“ survive the other two, preserve it's Nature
“ and Office, and stand before the Host of
“ Heaven, distributing Blessings, when Time
“ shall be no more.” But before we come
to the Enjoyment of this great Felicity, there
is nothing that more tends to encourage our
Perseverance in well-doing, to lighten our
Burden, and to carry us chearfully and suc-
cessfully through the many wearisome Stages
we are to pass in our Pilgrimage through
this World, than a lively Hope in the Power
and Promises of God. But then, *before* we
can arrive at such a Hope, we must at least
have a general Disposition to Goodness; and
after we have, in some measure, attained a
well-grounded Hope, we must then labour
to go on to Perfection, by *purifying ourselves*
even as God is pure. St. *John* indeed takes
express Notice only of the *last* of these; but
as the *first* is likewise necessarily included, I
shall consider both; and accordingly I pro-
pose, in explaining and enforcing the Words
of the Text, to do these three Things. (1.)
I shall consider the Nature and Properties of
a true Christian Hope. (2.) I shall inquire
what Duties are requisite or necessary, in order
to

to the attainment of this Hope ; and (3.) what Duties such a Hope, when attained, will oblige us to the Practice of. And

First, Let us consider the Nature and Properties of a true Christian Hope. Now *Christian Hope* may be defined to be a lively, well-grounded, and patient Expectation of the Performance of God's gracious Promises to us, in his own due Time ; and like all other Virtues is placed between two opposite Vices, *Presumption* on the one hand, and *Despair* on the other ; which it will be necessary for me to explain in few Words, in order to give you the clearer Apprehension of this excellent Grace. *Presumption* then is an unreasonable *Excess* of Hope, or such a Hope as has not sufficient Grounds or Foundation for its Support. God's Promises, in relation to the Happiness of the next World, are all *conditional* ; and according as we fulfill or do not fulfill the Conditions required of us, so our Hopes of Happiness should rise or fall. But now the *presumptuous Man* either concludes that he has qualified himself for the Enjoyment of Happiness, when he has not ; or that eternal Happiness is to be obtain'd upon easier and more favourable Terms, than God
has

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has proposed to us in his Word. Either way, he is liable to the most fatal Deception: By the first he discovers his Ignorance of himself, and by the other his Ignorance of God. And indeed as all Presumption proceeds from Pride, so all Pride is founded in Ignorance. So that Presumption is nothing else but a Man's thinking better of his own State and Condition than it really is, or a mistaking the Terms and Conditions of Salvation. On the other hand, *Despair*, which is carrying things to the other Extreme, is a Man's thinking worse of his own State, or harder of God, than he ought to think. I don't speak here of an *absolute* Despair that is void of all Hope, which is the Case of the Reprobate in the other World, or of such a Despair as arises wholly or chiefly from a melancholy Disposition or ill Habit of Body; but I mean only that Kind of Despair, or those Tendencies to it, that proceed from an *Excess* of Humility, or too deep and pungent a Sense of the Guilt and Demerits of Sin, without having due Recourse to that *Anchor of the Soul both sure and stedfast*, the infinite Mercy, Merits, and Mediation of our Blessed Redeemer. And indeed should God think fit at any time to display

play before the Eyes of Sinners, the Vileness, Nothingness, and Sinfulness of their own State by Nature, without affording them at the same time a clear View of the comfortable Promises of the Gospel, they would be startled and confounded at the Sight of themselves, and be in Danger of being quite overwhelmed with Despair. But now, as the best Preservative against both these fatal Extremes, we should call to our Assistance those two excellent Christian Graces, *Humility* and *Faith*, which are both the Badge and Support of a Christian. The first will keep us from Presumption, and the other from Despondency; and both together will lead us on by gentle and leisurely Steps to that comfortable Grace I am now considering of, a holy and joyful Hope in the Goodness and Promises of God. For *Christian Hope*, as I observed before, is a lively, well-grounded, and patient Expectation of God's gracious Promises, in his own due time; and has respect more particularly to the future Recompence of Reward; which is the only thing St. *John* refers to, or takes notice of, as we see in the Words before my Text. —

Beloved, now are we the Sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: But we know,

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know, that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. The Hope then of a Christian must be lively and chearful, on account of the Certainty and Excellency of the Reward. It must likewise be well-grounded, and be made to keep an even Pace with our Progress in Goodness, rather something behind, than any thing too forward, as respecting our own Unworthiness after our best Endeavours, and the free and undeserved Mercy of God, that so it may be free from every Degree and Tincture of Pride and Presumption. Another Property of true Christian Hope is, that it be attended and temper'd with *Patience*, and exercised about things *future and invisible*. This Character of it is particularly mentioned by *St. Paul* — *We are saved by Hope : But Hope that is seen, is not Hope : For what a Man seeth, why doth he yet hope for ? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with Patience wait for it.* — *If therefore the Lord tarry, we must wait for him ; for he will surely come, he will not tarry always.* And therefore the same Apostle tells us elsewhere, that such a patient Hope, tho' it may be made to wait long, shall not be disappointed at the last. *Knowing,*
says

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says he, *that Tribulation worketh Patience, and Patience Experience, and Experience Hope, and Hope maketh not ashamed.* That is, there will be no Occasion in the End to be ashamed, or repent of having placed our Hope and Trust in God. On the contrary, there is even at present great Reason to rejoice, and great Inducement to go on with Courage and Constancy in our Duty, without Fainting or Despondency, as knowing that *the Sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the Glory that shall be revealed in us.* Having thus briefly explain'd the *Nature* and *Properties* of a true Christian Hope, I come, in the

Second place, to consider, what Duties are requisite and necessary in order to the attainment of it. Now all that is required for this End may be reduced to those two general and comprehensive Duties of the Gospel, *Faith* and *Repentance*; without which we can have no Grounds to hope for Pardon and Salvation. *Faith is the Substance of Things hoped for,* and represents to our Minds the invisible Things of the other World, tho' not with the same Clearness, yet with almost the same Certainty, as if they were really and actually present

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sent with us. But how can we *hope* for Things, that either we do not believe, or do not exercise our Faith or Thoughts upon? Things that are but slightly remember'd, or but coldly entertain'd, can't be the Objects of our earnest Wishes and Expectations. Then as to *Repentance*, we know, that without this we can't see the Lord; and therefore to hope for Heaven and Happiness while we continue in our Sins, or before we have duly repented of them, is not only vain, but sinful, and adds Presumption to our Guilt. Men may *hope*, even while they are in their *natural State*, that God will be so merciful to them as to spare them a little longer, and continue to exercise his Forbearance and Long-suffering towards them; that he will at last, by the Aids and Influences of his Holy Spirit, renew them to Repentance; and in the mean-while, that he will not *despise the Day of small Things*, but cherish and promote the first Essays, Tendencies, and Beginnings of the new Life in them. But nothing less than a *sound Faith* and *tried Repentance* can give us any rational Grounds to hope to be made Partakers of the Felicity of his Chosen, or fill our Souls with earnest Desire and Longing after the heavenly
Bliss.

Bliss. The Desire of Happiness in general is implanted in all Men ; but a particular and ardent Desire of the Happiness of the next Life, is what none can attain unto, in any good Degree, without having made some Progress in the Ways of Holiness, and especially in the passive Duties of our holy Religion. For this enlivening Principle is best seen, and will be of greatest Service to us in a Time of Affliction. If we have Hope enough to sustain us under the Trials and Pressures of this Life, this is a sufficient Motive and Inducement to us to proceed in our Duty ; and the more we grow in *Grace*, the more we shall increase and abound in *Hope*. And further, God is sometimes pleased, out of his abundant Favour and Goodness, to vouchsafe to his Servants under the Discipline of his Corrections, or the Clouds of Adversity, a clearer Prospect of the Joys and Glories of Heaven, with a Design to support and sustain them in their Trials and Conflicts, and to encourage their Faithfulness and Perseverance. If then we desire to be filled with this blessed Hope, and to have a comfortable Expectation of obtaining the Promise of eternal Life, we must be careful to avoid every Thing that will hinder

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der or obstruct our Pursuit after this great End, and often exercise our Faith upon the Things which are not seen. And this brings me, in the

Third place, to inquire what particular Duties such a Hope, when attained, will oblige us to the Practice of. St. *John* mentions only in general a greater Degree of Purity. *Every Man that hath this Hope in him, purifieth himself even as God is pure.* Which Words comprehend all those Duties and Virtues, that tend more directly to qualify us for the Enjoyment of the heavenly Bliss, more particularly Self-denial and Watchfulness, Purity of Heart and Holiness of Conversation. He that believeth he *can't do too much* to obtain the Promise of eternal Life, and that is endued with a comfortable Hope of obtaining this Promise, will think it no such hard Thing to suffer for his Sins here, will refuse no Labour, decline no Difficulties or Dangers, when called to them, in order to partake of the Blessedness he hopes for. For Hope is an active Principle, that will not suffer us to give way to Idleness, Vanity, or Despondency; but, when we are indisposed for higher Duties, will lead us on to some others of meaner Rank,

that so we may be always usefully employ'd; and, by this Means, will excite us continually, one way or other, to a vigorous Pursuit after the *Prize of the high Calling of God in Christ Jesus*. And nothing generally contributes more to this, than Self-denial and Watchfulness. The former is necessary, in order to purify our Nature, and to prepare us for a State of Happiness. For *without Holiness no Man shall see the Lord*; and without Self-denial no Man can attain unto Holiness. 'Tis this must enable us to subdue our natural Corruptions, and to get the Mastery over our own Wills, which would otherwise subject us to the vilest Slavery. This was the Resolution and Practice of the blessed Apostle St. Paul: — *All things are lawful for me, says he, but all things are not expedient; all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the Power of any*. No, he prefer'd the Liberty of his own Mind, before any Liberty he might enjoy in the use of Things lawful or innocent; and denied himself in lesser Matters, that he might have the greater Freedom in Things of Moment and Importance. This is the Nature and Consequence of Self-denial: And yet this is the Duty that is commonly
thought

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thought so hard a Saying, and that gives so many a secret Disgust to Christianity. But not to insist upon the happy Effects of this Practice, what is there in the Duty itself, that is so very frightful; or that can, upon a closer View, be thought the least unreasonable? Especially, if we consider the present Corruption of human Nature, and that all we can possibly deny ourselves for the Sake of God and Religion, is nothing in Comparison of what our Blessed Saviour freely denied himself for our Sakes. Besides, without the Practice of this Duty, how can we hope to be like God hereafter? Or how can we act like him here; since *Self-denial* comes enforced and recommended to us, not only by the Precept, but even by the Example of God himself? For what is all his Patience, Long-suffering, and Forbearance towards Sinners, but so many Acts and Instances of Self-denial? He denies himself for a time the Execution of his Justice, and the Vindication of his own Authority. He often draws back his Hand, when it is lifted up against us, and *in Wrath remembers Mercy*. And all this is nothing but Self-denial in a Being that is *infinitely pure* and *perfect*, that has the Command of all, and

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is subject to none. And shall *we*, that are so impure and so imperfect, that are Slaves by Nature, and Servants by Covenant, refuse to submit to some little Self-denials, for the Pleasure of our Master, and for our own Profit, that we may be Partakers of his Holiness and Happiness? Let us then be assured, that he who has not yet learnt to deny himself in many Things, can have no comfortable or well-grounded Hope of future Happiness; since, if he had the one, he would not refuse to practise the other. *Secondly*, The other Duty I mention'd, that must help us to *purify ourselves, even as God is pure*, is *Watchfulness*; by which I don't mean a Watchfulness against open and presumptuous Sins; for that is necessary *beforehand*, in order to attain a firm Hope in the Promises of God: But I mean a Care and Watchfulness in smaller Matters, and in the lesser Duties of Religion; which will be as a Fence and Guard to the greater. 'Tis a just Observation of the Son of *Sirach* — *He that despiseth small things, shall perish by little and little*; and the Observation may be found as just and true on the other side — *He that regardeth small things, shall rise by little and little*. An exact and
punctual

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punctual Discharge of any one Duty, be it never so small, will often draw after it the Performance of many others; and is proper to lead us on to higher Degrees of Virtue and Goodness, and to secure our Constancy and Perseverance. And they who hope for and aspire after the immortal Crown, and earnestly desire to be made Partakers of the Inheritance of the Saints in Light, and to see God as he is, will be tenderly cautious of doing *any thing* that may obscure their Evidence, or lessen their Assurance, or tend to deprive them of so great Felicity. For 'tis *Hope* that is the Life of Christians; which therefore they, who are sincerely such, will not forego or diminish for all the Enjoyments of this lower World. 'Tis this that helps them to maintain their Virtue, and to bear up against Troubles and Trials of all Sorts; that inspires them with Resolution and Courage, enables them to encounter Difficulties and Dangers, prepares them for the hardest Services, and sets them above the Fear of Death itself. Witness the noble Army of Martyrs, who, animated with this enlivening Principle, cheerfully laid down their Lives, that they might obtain a better Resurrection. But then a Hope thus victori-

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ous and successful, must be a rational and well-grounded Hope, that is raised upon the solid Foundation of a sound Faith and sincere Obedience, and, by frequent Exercise, become vigorous and strong. And such a Hope as this will stand by us in the Day of Trial, help us forward in our Way to Heaven, and conduct us safe to our Journey's End. But if we hope for Things, that God has given us no Grounds or Encouragement to hope for; or if we hope for that *absolutely*, which he has promised only *conditionally*; or if we desire and expect him to perform his Promises to us, without endeavouring ourselves to perform what he has commanded us; all this is no better than sinful Presumption and Self-delusion, and instead of pleasing God, our Faith and Hope is turn'd into Sin. But a Hope that has not only the divine Promises for its Object, but a well-order'd Life and Conversation for its Support, is both pleasing to God and profitable to ourselves, as 'tis a great Motive to Patience, a Spur to Watchfulness, and a powerful Incentive to *purify ourselves even as God is pure*; as might be shewn from a distinct Consideration of the many great Promises that God has been pleased to make

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us. But not to enlarge now on so copious a Subject, I shall only mention at present two of the greatest Promises, *viz.* those of the Resurrection of the Body, and of eternal Life; and endeavour to shew, as a proper Conclusion to this Discourse, that a lively Hope of each of these, has a strong and direct Tendency to produce in us Purity of Heart and Life.

First, As to the Resurrection of the Body, this great Promise is peculiar to the Gospel, and what could not be known but by Revelation. When St. Paul preached at *Athens* *Jesus and the Resurrection*, they thought he had preach'd unto them *some strange Gods*. They were so far from being acquainted with the *Thing*, that they did not understand the *Name*. The Resurrection was not only a Mystery to them, but an Absurdity and Contradiction. Some of the wiser *Heathens*, indeed, had some glimmering Hopes and confused Apprehensions of the *Immortality of the Soul*: This is what they were willing to believe, and labour'd to prove, but were forced to conclude with Doubts and Wishes, instead of Satisfaction or Demonstration. But as to the *Resurrection of the Body*, this is what
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they never dreamt of, and what neither Reason nor Revelation could convince them of, without some plain Proofs and undeniable Instances of the *Possibility* of the Thing. And therefore it was that the Resurrection of *Christ* was so proper, so full, and satisfactory an Evidence to the *Gentile* World of the Truth and Divinity of his Religion. And accordingly God was pleased to propound it as such to them by this same Apostle, who delivered these remarkable Words before his *Athenian* Auditors — *The times of this Ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all Men every where to repent; because he hath appointed a Day, in which he will judge the World in Righteousness, by that Man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given Assurance unto all Men, in that he hath raised him from the Dead.* But *Christ* was raised not for himself alone, but for the Benefit of all his Members, as the Head or Representative of his mystical Body, the Church. For *Christ* being raised from the Dead, is not only a Proof and Demonstration of the *Possibility*, but a Pledge and Earnest of the *Certainty* of our Resurrection. And this is so great a Privilege, so distinguishing a Mark of

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of God's peculiar Goodness towards his faithful Servants, that a lively Hope and serious Consideration of this signal Promise, must needs excite in us a pious Concern for our Bodies as well as for our Souls, and make us careful to *possess* them in *Sanctification and Honour*; both as they are at present the Habitation of our own Souls, as they are design'd for the Temples of the Holy Ghost, and as the same Soul and the same Body will be united again after their Separation. St. Paul tell us, that *if the Spirit of him that raised up Christ from the Dead, dwell in us, he that raised up Christ from the Dead, shall also quicken our mortal Bodies, by his Spirit that dwelleth in us.* We can't hope to have a Share in the Resurrection of the Just, unless the Spirit of God dwell in us; and we can't hope, that the Spirit of God will dwell in us, unless we take care to preserve these mortal Bodies of ours in such a manner, as that the God of Purity may not disdain to reside in them. This is the Argument implied in these Words of St. Paul; and a strong and forcible Argument it is. For by them he intimates and insinuates, that the Belief and Hope of the Resurrection is a powerful Motive to engage us to a religious
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Care and Regard for our Bodies, since they are not only to be raised again, but to be raised by that Spirit that dwelleth in them: And that is a Spirit of Holiness. By partaking then of this Spirit, we may be said to partake of a Principle of Immortality; and that with respect to the Body, which is now consecrated by his Inhabitation, and will be quicken'd and raised hereafter by means of his powerful Operation; and that to a State of Glory and Immortality, which is the other great Promise I mention'd, and which St. *John* emphatically styles *THE Promise*, by way of Eminence and Distinction — *This is THE Promise which he hath promised us, even eternal Life.* And truly this is by far the greatest of all; and accordingly is represented in Scripture as more particularly the Object of a Christian's Hope, and therefore is called *the blessed Hope*, and *the Hope that is laid up for us in Heaven.* Now as a lively Hope in the former Promise, concerning the Resurrection of the Body, has a more direct Tendency to influence our Conduct, with respect to that Part which is to be raised; so *every Man that hath this Hope in him*, the Hope of eternal Life, will think himself obliged to have a
more

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more especial Regard to the Purification of his Soul, that he may be qualified at length for Admittance into a State that is of the utmost Purity and Perfection, and for enjoying a Happiness too big for mortal Men to have any just Apprehension of; a Happiness the most valuable and the most durable, exceeding not only all that we can wish or desire, but even all that we can conceive or imagine; with which all the Felicities of this lower World are not fit to be compared, or worthy to be named. For he that is lowest in the Kingdom of Heaven, is higher than all the Kings of the Earth; and the meanest Saint there inherits more than all that is to be seen or enjoy'd under the Sun. And their Security of enjoying what they are once possessed of, is as firm and stable, as God's Love and Goodness to his Elect, which will never change, or be diminished. And what a powerful and forcible Motive is this to a chearful Obedience; and how sweetly and strongly does it persuade us to *purify ourselves even as God is pure*? Were this Promise of eternal Life more the Object of our Faith, Hope, and Desire, we should certainly labour more to obtain it, and to qualify ourselves for the Enjoyment of it. 'Tis our losing the Sight
of

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of it, or the Neglect of duly attending to it, that makes us so often fail in our Duty, and so ready to faint under a Sense of Difficulty and Danger: Whereas this Promise in particular is given to us for our Support and Encouragement, during our Pilgrimage here, and to fortify us against the Trials and Troubles of this Life. Let us then improve it to the End for which it was given and designed; by endeavouring all we can to secure our Title to it, or, in the Words of the Apostle, by *using all Diligence to make our Calling and Election sure.*

Which GOD, of his infinite Mercy, grant, for JESUS CHRIST'S Sake, to whom, with the FATHER and the HOLY GHOST, Three Persons, and One God, be ascribed, as is most due, all Honour and Glory, Dominion and Praise, now and for ever. Amen.

SERMON

SERMON VII.

Sincere Obedience the only sure Token of being endued with the Love of God.

JOHN xiv. 23.

*Jesus answered and said unto him,
If a Man love me, he will keep
my Words: And my Father will
love him, and we will come unto
him, and make our Abode with
him.*

THE Occasion of these Words we have in the two foregoing Verses. Our Blessed Saviour having exhorted and pressed his Disciples to a strict Observance of his Commandments, as the surest Testimony of their Love to him, and as the best Means

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Means to secure his Love to them, gave them this farther Promise, and Encouragement, that if they continued obedient, he would *manifest himself to them.* Upon hearing these Words, the faithful *Judas* (not *Judas Iscariot*) with a Mixture of Humility, Surprise, and Joy, proposed this Question to him — *Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the World?* Jesus made answer, that the ready Way to obtain and enjoy this Favour, was a sincere and constant Obedience to his Commands, and then informed him, wherein this Favour or Privilege consisted, *namely,* in a holy Communion with God the Father and himself — *We will come unto him and make our Abode with him.* Our Lord did not question the Sincerity of their Affection in general; but required an evident and continued Proof and Demonstration of it, both for a Support and Security of their Virtue, and for their own constant Satisfaction and Consolation. Nor, on the other hand, would he give them any infallible Assurance of the Reality and Constancy of their Love. For tho' he *knew all Men, and needed not that any should testify of Man, because he knew what was in Man,* and therefore

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fore could have assured them at once, that they had a true Love for him, and would continue in this Love unto their Lives End: Yet he knew it would be more for their Advantage to be kept in a State of some Uncertainty with respect to their final Perseverance, as it would be a Means to excite and quicken them to a greater Care and Vigilance; and therefore he left them to collect and infer the Truth and Strength of their Love to him from their own daily Practice, as the surest Test and Token of their Sincerity. *The Heart of Man is deceitful above all Things*, saith the Prophet. He is often ignorant of his *present* State, and much more of his *future* Fidelity or Perseverance. No Man can be absolutely sure of his patient Continuance in well-doing, or of being constant unto Death; and the Best of Men have Reason to entertain some Diffidence or Distrust of themselves. *St. Paul* declares, that *tho' he knew nothing by himself*; or whereof to accuse himself, yet *was he not thereby justified*, but *he that judged him was the Lord*. Our Hearts may and often do deceive us; and were we left to judge of our spiritual State or Condition only by them, we might be subject to continual

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nual Self-delusion. But our Blessed Saviour has otherwise ordered the Matter for us, and more particularly in the present Case: And that we might not presume upon having the Love of God, when we have it not, or doubt or distrust of our being possessed of it, when we really have it, he puts the Trial of our Love upon the fairest and plainest Issue, *viz.* our Obedience to his Commands. If we say, that we love God or our Saviour, and don't keep his Commandments, *we deceive ourselves, and the Truth is not in us.* But *he that bath my Commandments, and keepeth them,* says our Saviour in the Words before my Text, *he it is that loveth me;* and in the Text, *If a Man love me, he will keep my Words.* Which great and important Doctrine is often repeated, and very much pressed upon us by our Lord and his Apostles, and more particularly by St. John, who, among other Expressions to this Purpose, has this remarkable Passage: — *Who so keepeth his Word, in him verily is the Love of God perfected.* So that as St. Paul makes Charity to be *the End of the Commandment;* this Apostle represents the keeping of the Commandments, as the End or Consummation of Charity.

Now

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Now every Christian must, in some measure, be sensible, of how great Consequence it is to him, to be endued with the Love of God, which *Christ* himself calls *the first and great Commandment*, and without which all Pretensions to Religion are vain. He should likewise consider how much he stands indebted, how much he is obliged to his Saviour, and consequently how much he ought to love him, and that without loving him, he can't hope to be saved by him. And therefore whatever else we are ignorant of, we should take care not to be ignorant of this, *namely*, whether we have the true Love of *Christ* abiding in us: And there is no other Way to be fully assured of this ourselves, or to be able to satisfy others, but by Obedience to his Commands. He that neglects or despises his Commands, whatever he may pretend, 'tis plain, does not love *Christ* in sincerity; and whosoever does not love *Christ* in sincerity, lies under the Sentence of that dreadful Curse denounced by *St. Paul* against all such —
If any Man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha. It is therefore of infinite Concern to us all, to try and examine ourselves, by the only sure Rule of his Commandments, whether we have the

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Love of *Christ* grafted in our Hearts; and if we find, upon Examination, that we have not, to give our Souls no Rest, till we are, in some measure, endued with this most necessary and excellent Virtue; which can be obtained, secured, and manifested no other way, than by a diligent, constant, and conscientious Discharge of our Duty towards him. And that nothing might be wanting to promote and encourage our Endeavours in this Respect, our Blessed Lord is here pleased to invite us to the Study and Practice of this most amiable Virtue, by the Promise and Assurance of the greatest Blessing we can have on this side Heaven — *If a Man love me, he will keep my Words: And my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our Abode with him.* In my further Discourse on which Words, I propose to do these three Things: (1.) I shall endeavour to prove this general Proposition, *viz.* That all Pretensions to the Love of God, without keeping his Commandments, are vain and insignificant. (2.) That the only sure Testimony of having the Love of God, is a sincere Obedience. (3.) That they who manifest their Love by such an Obedience, are peculiarly loved by God, and taken into his more especial Favour.

First,

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First, I am to prove, that all Pretensions to the Love of God, without keeping his Commandments, are vain and insignificant. We may profess our Love to God, and really believe that we have a true Love for him, and be ready to conclude, that nothing can separate us from his Love; and yet, when brought to the Test, we may soon find to our Sorrow, that the Love of God is still so weak and languid, as not to be able to stand the Shock of a very common Misfortune or Calamity. Men generally suppose they are endued with this Virtue, if they are zealous for God's Honour and Service, and in performing Acts of Piety and Charity; and these indeed are good Signs and Tokens of loving God, so far as they reach or extend. But if they stand alone, without the Support of other Graces, they are Virtues in Appearance only, and not in Reality; and so can be no Proof or Testimony of that highest Christian Attainment, the Love of God and our Saviour. This we shall more readily perceive, if we examine each of these three specious Pretensions distinctly and apart. 1. An outward Zeal for God's Honour and Service carries the Appearance of a sincere and mighty Affection

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for him. And where this Zeal indeed is well-grounded, and duly regulated, it shews the Man that is acted by it to be endued with a Principle of Divine Love. But how much false and blind Zeal is there in the World! which hinders Men from seeing and pursuing their own true Interest, as well as the Honour of God; that makes them act contrary to the Dictates of right Reason, as well as of true Religion, and too often carries them beyond the Bounds even of common Decency and Humanity. Now it would be absurd and impious to affirm, that such a Zeal as this is the genuine Fruit and Product of Divine Love; which is of a quite different Nature, and much kindlier Aspect, and speaks it's Divine Original, by making Men slow to Anger, and easy to be intreated, full of Mercy and Condescension, and like their heavenly Father, kind even to the Unthankful and to the Evil. A Zeal that is not duly temper'd and govern'd by Prudence and Charity, is a dangerous Virtue, if it may be call'd a Virtue, while it is alone; as it is apt to betray Men into great Irregularities, and much more likely to do Mischief than to do Good. *The Wrath of Man, saith the Apostle, worketh*

not

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not the Righteousness of God. And Zeal, without Discretion and Charity, is no other than *religious Wrath*, and proceeds more from the Warmth of Temper, than from any due Love or Regard to God. We can't therefore *certainly* conclude that we are endued with the true Love of God, because we find in ourselves sometimes a Zeal and Concern for his Honour and Glory, unless that Zeal be accompanied with other Virtues and Graces, that may serve to discover it's Regularity and Worth. But if *Zeal alone* be not a sufficient Testimony in this Case, yet, 2. We may be inclin'd to hope, that *Acts of Piety* are a plain and undoubted Proof of our Love to God. I don't deny but that this is true in a proper Sense. For tho' this is more than can be asserted of the mere *outward* Acts of Piety, yet we may safely affirm, that there is not a *surer* Sign of the Love of God, than a *truly religious and pious Disposition*; which indeed is no other than a Complication of all Christian Graces and Virtues together. But then this can be certainly known only to a Man's self; and is not to be discovered or manifested to others without Danger of being lost in the Appearance. As to the common

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and external Acts of Devotion in publick or private, they are no farther Signs in this respect, either to ourselves or others, even when performed with Regularity and Reverence, than as they are productive of good Works, and attended with a holy Life and Conversation. They are proper Means for attaining the Love of God, and for securing and increasing it when it is attained; but are no certain Tokens of the one or the other. We ought to perform these outward Acts of Piety with Care and Constancy, but not to trust or depend upon them. If we love God, we shall neither neglect nor abuse such Means of Grace; and if we use them with Diligence and Perseverance, we may reasonably hope, tho' we can't be absolutely assured from thence, that we have the Love of God abiding in us. You see then that neither an inward Zeal, nor an outward Piety, when considered alone, or as single Virtues, are to be esteemed as *certain* Marks of the Love of God. They are good and proper Helps that way, but not such sure Signs as we may safely depend upon. But if these are not sufficient Proofs or Characters of having the true Love of God, it may still be urged in the
third

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third Place, that *Works of Charity* are undoubtedly the Effect and Product of Divine Love. 'Tis true, our Saviour looks upon all such Deeds of Charity to our Neighbour, when rightly performed, as done to himself, and has promised to reward them accordingly.

—— *Inasmuch as ye have done it to the least of these my Brethren, ye have done it unto me.* And from hence it may be inferred, that such Acts of Charity are proper Testimonials and plain Demonstrations of the Love of *Christ*; and so indeed they are, when done with an Eye or Regard to him, and in Obedience to his Command. For, as he himself declares, *Whosoever shall give to one of these little ones a Cup of cold Water only in the Name of a Disciple (or because he belongs to Christ) verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his Reward.* The whole Virtue of this Charity, you see, consists in doing this *in the Name of a Disciple*, or to one that *belongs to Christ*, that is, out of pure Respect to him. And upon this Account, a Cup of cold Water is more valuable and more rewardable, than Thousands of Silver and Gold, given upon any other Account. But how many Acts of Charity do Men perform, without any such

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Consideration or Intention, and when *Christ* is not in all their Thoughts! *St. Paul* makes it a possible Case for a Man to give all his Goods to feed the Poor, and yet to be destitute of true Charity. And therefore I say, that the mere Act of Charity, which may be done, not out of Gratitude, or in Obedience to him, but from other Views and Designs, is no sure Token of Love to him. 'Tis not therefore the Quantity that is given, nor our compassionate Concern for the Objects we give to, nor the Usefulness of the Work that may be designed to be carried on, that will always recommend our Charity to God, or prove us to be true Lovers of him. There are other proper Ingredients required to complete a charitable Act; and the Crown and Perfection of the whole, is the doing it *in the Name* and *for the Sake* of our Saviour *Christ*, who shed his Blood and laid down his Life for us, and *for our Sakes became poor, that we through his Poverty might be rich.* If we don't give with an Intent to please our Saviour, and in Obedience to his Command, and to make some small Return for all the mighty Benefits he hath done unto us, we can't be said, *by such Gifts or Deeds of Charity to love him, or to have*

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have any just Sense of his Love to us. From hence then it plainly appears, that the *outward* Act of Charity is no sure distinguishing Mark of our being endued with the Love of God or of *Christ*. Nor, *lastly*, can we be fully assured of this by any *internal* Evidence of our own Hearts, *consider'd abstractedly as such*. Indeed when the *Heart* and *Life* of Man concur in the same Testimony, and, like Tallies, answer to one another, there is then all the *moral Certainty* than can be had in a Case of this Nature: To which is sometimes added, for a farther Comfort and Confirmation, a *Divine Assurance* or the Testimony of the Holy Spirit, according to that of *St. Paul*—*The Spirit itself beareth Witness with our Spirit, that we are the Children of God*. This, I say, is sometimes indulged sincere Christians, as a Favour and for the Encouragement of their Perseverance. Were they always left to the uncertain GuesSES of their own Mind, they would be continually wavering between Hopes and Fears, and never free from Doubts, Perplexities, and Misgivings. And were they to judge of their spiritual State, or of their Love and Affection to God, by no other Evidence than what is *internal*, they would often be impos'd

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impos'd upon by their Senses and Passions, and be apt to conclude themselves possess'd, or destitute of this heavenly Grace, according to the different Temper of Mind they happen to be in, or the Ebbings and Flowings of the animal Spirits, or the Fervour and Languor of their Devotions: All which, and the like uncertain Signs and Symptoms would have subjected Mankind to perpetual Scruples and endless Delusions. Our Blessed Lord therefore was pleas'd to take another Method with us, and to put the Trial of our Love to him upon a plainer and shorter Issue, *viz.* the keeping his Commandments; which takes in the concurrent Testimony of the Heart and Life. Either of these separate is not sufficient in this Case. The outward Acts of Zeal, Piety, and Charity, and the inward Persuasion that a Man may have of his being endued with the Love of God, are neither of them inconsistent with unmortified Affections and some lesser Habits of Sin. But 'tis not consistent or supposeable, in the Nature of Things, that any Man can truly love God, and at the same time love what he hates. Therefore nothing less can assure us of our having this Love, than a sincere and uniform Obedience; which

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is what our Saviour very much inculcates on his Disciples, and no less than three times in this very Chapter, to shew the great Importance of this Doctrine. — *If ye love me,* says he, *keep my Commandments.* Again, *He that bath my Commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me.* Then in the Text, *If a Man love me, he will keep my Words.* From which several Passages, I only observe at present, that our Blessed Lord seems to take it for granted, that all who believe in him must necessarily make Profession of Love to him. While he was present with his Disciples, they were ready on all Occasions to testify their ardent Affection for him. And it would have been the greatest Wonder, if they had not then unfeignedly loved *Him*, who had given such sensible and extraordinary Demonstrations of his Love to them. But the Time was coming and near at hand, when he should be taken away from them; and then would be the Trial, whether they sincerely loved him, or not: And therefore our Blessed Saviour required beforehand this Test of their Love to him, *viz.* the due Observance of his Commands — *If ye love me, keep my Commandments.* And this is the Test which
he

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he now requires of all his Followers, of all that call themselves Christians; as shall be shewn hereafter. Let me now only farther observe, that our Obligations to love God and our Saviour are so manifold and so powerful, as would not fail of having their due Influence and Effect upon us, if they were but frequently and seriously considered. And on the other hand, the Case of those who do not sincerely love their Saviour, is so dangerous and dreadful, that all their Services and Professions, *without this*, are of no Worth or Value in his Sight. And therefore it behoves us, as we have any Love or Regard for ourselves, to take heed that our own Hearts do not deceive us in this respect, and that we do not depend upon such Signs and Tokens of our Love to him, as are often delusive and always uncertain. If we earnestly desire to be endued with this most necessary and excellent Virtue, we shall use all proper Means and Endeavours for the Attainment of it. And if we be not wanting in the Use of Means, we shall find that what we can neither deserve, nor are able to procure for ourselves, God will by Degrees enable us to obtain, and work that in us, which is most pleasing and acceptable to him,
and

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and most profitable and beneficial to ourselves,
the Foundation of true and solid Comfort in
this World, and the surest Pledge of eternal
Happiness in the World to come.

*Now to God the FATHER, God the SON,
and God the HOLY GHOST, be ascribed,
as is most due, all Honour and Glory,
Might, Majesty, Obedience, and Thanksgiv-
ing, now and for ever. Amen.*

SERMON

SERMON VIII.

Sincere Obedience, the only sure
Token of being endued with the
Love of GOD.

JOHN XIV. 23.

*Jesus answered and said unto him,
If a Man love me, he will keep
my Words: And my Father will
love him, and we will come unto
him, and make our Abode with
him.*

IN these Words are implied these two general Doctrines. (1.) That as a Principle of Divine Love is naturally productive of good Works, so the only sure Testimony of having the Love of God, or of *Christ*, is a sincere Obedience. (2.) That those

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those who manifest their Love by such an Obedience, are peculiarly entitled to the Divine Favour and Benediction. — The former of these Heads consists of two distinct Branches; the first of which is contained in these Words of the Text — *If a Man love me, he will keep my Words*; that is, this will be the necessary Effect of his Love; and the other in the Words foregoing — *He that bath my Commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me*; that is, this is the surest Token of his Love to me.

As to the *First*, there are indeed other Principles of Obedience besides that of *Love*, as *Faith*, *Fear*, and *Hope*; but these are all reducible to the Love of God. *Faith* is defined by the Apostle to be *the Evidence of Things not seen*, or a *seeing him who is invisible*; and so represents God to our Minds in all his amiable and adorable Perfections, as an Object the most worthy of our highest Esteem, Affection, and Veneration. And therefore St. Paul speaking of a saving Faith, calls it a *Faith that worketh by Love*. *Fear*, taken in the best Sense, is a necessary *Part* or Ingredient of Love, implying a cautious Tenderness of offending or displeasing, attended with a hearty Sorrow

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Sorrow and Contrition for having offended, and a zealous Endeavour to make the best Reparation for any Offence that has been given. But when *Fear* is opposed to or contradistinguished from *Love*, it then signifies more particularly a Consciousness of Guilt, and a Dread thereupon of those awful and tremendous Attributes of God, his Power, Justice, and Holiness. In this Sense perhaps 'tis more frequently used by the sacred Writers, as it is most evidently by St. *John* in this remarkable Passage — *Herein is our Love made perfect, that we may have Boldness in the Day of Judgment. There is no Fear in Love; but perfect Love casteth out Fear; because Fear bath Torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in Love.* Which can't be meant of a *filial Fear*, or of a Fear of offending, which always accompanies the Children of God in this Life, or of a Fear, Awe, and Reverence of the Greatness and Majesty of God, which the very Angels are not exempted from; but must be understood of a Fear or Dread of Punishment, that, as the Apostle here observes, is attended with *Torment*, from which the other Fear joined with the Love of God at last sets us free. Then as to *Hope*, that
other

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other Principle of Obedience, this likewise is founded directly on the Love of God: For we hope only for Things *lovely* and *desireable*; and therefore we must highly esteem and love God, before we can *hope* or even desire to enjoy him. You see then that *Faith*, *Fear*, and *Hope*, are the Effects or Concomitants of Love; and that the Love of God, as it includes all these, is the most comprehensive Principle of a sincere and uniform Obedience. The *Fear of Punishment* will keep Men from *doing Evil*; but 'tis the *Love of God* that must make them active and vigorous in *doing good*. *Faith* will bring us, as it were, within Sight of Heaven and Happiness; but 'tis *Love* that stirs us up to an eager Desire and Pursuit after them. *Hope* will carry us on chearfully in the Discharge of our Duty, and in the Work of our Salvation; but 'tis *Love* that gives Wings to our *Hope*, and procures Success or Acceptance to our Endeavours. And as a Principle of divine Love is thus naturally productive of good Works: So

Secondly, The only sure Testimony of being endued with this Principle of Love is a sincere Obedience; and that, whether considered with respect to others, or to ourselves.

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As to ourselves, tho' we did more carefully observe and examine the Motions and Operations of our own Minds, and were better acquainted with the real Bent and Tendency of our Hearts, than we generally are, we could not certainly know or conclude from thence, that we have the Love of God abiding in us. Our Intentions may be sincere, our Inclinations virtuous, our Resolutions for Goodness firm and strong, at least so far as we can judge or apprehend: And yet when these are brought to the Test, and carried into Action, we may sometimes find to our Sorrow, that we were not so good and virtuous, as we thought ourselves to be. How often do Men's zealous Intentions cool and languish, their good Resolutions flag, and their pious Inclinations vanish at the Appearance of some unexpected Danger! The Case of repenting Sinners on a sick Bed, is a strong, but melancholy Proof of this Observation. They are then (we will suppose) awaken'd into a Sense of their Sin and Danger: They see and bemoan their past Follies: They are convinced of the Necessity of Repentance and a holy Life, in order to obtain Pardon and Salvation: They use all the Means then in their Power to pacify the
Wrath

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Wrath of God, and procure his Forgiveness: They freely confess their Sins to him, and intend nothing but Amendment: They resolve, they promise, they vow, that if God will be so merciful to them, as to restore them to their former Health, they will devote the Remainder of their Life to his Service: And all this they may then conclude to be the real Sentiment and Purpose of their Heart; and yet we see, by sad Experience, that the Generality of such Penitents are no sooner recovered, but all these wise Thoughts and holy Resolutions are forgotten and perish. So little Trust or Dependance is there to be had of virtuous Inclinations and pious Dispositions, considered in themselves, or before they are secured and confirmed by a Habit of Well-doing, or repeated Acts. From hence it is manifest, that the Knowledge of our own Sincerity is to be collected and inferred from the Performance of our Duty; and that the only sure Testimony, with respect to ourselves, of our having the Love of God, is the keeping his Commandments. The same is true likewise with respect to others; who being ignorant of our real Intentions, and incapable of searching of our Hearts, can form

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their Judgment of the present State of our Souls, no other way, than from a Knowledge or Observance of our outward Behaviour; which is the only Rule that God ordinarily allows Men to judge others by: And this alone is abundantly sufficient for all the Ends and Purposes of the present Life. The general Tenour of Men's Lives and Conversations is all that we are to regard in this Case. If we set aside this, and judge by other Rules or Measures, as we have no Warrant for so doing, it must be to our own Peril. Our Blessed Lord exhorted his Disciples to mutual Charity, from the Consideration of the Credit and Confirmation that this would give to their outward Profession:—*By this shall all Men know that ye are my Disciples, if ye have Love one to another.* And so may we say in the present Case, or in the general, by this shall all Men know that ye love God, if ye keep his Commandments. If we judge Men by any other Sign or Token, not in Conjunction with, but in Exclusion of that only sure Sign, the keeping God's Commandments, we act contrary to our Saviour's express Doctrine and Direction in this Case, exceed the Bounds that he hath set us, and usurp a Power that he
hath

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hath reserved to himself. But this is a *sure*, or at least a very safe Rule to judge by. We can judge of our own State or Sincerity no other Way, than by keeping or not keeping the Commandments of God; and much less are we able any other Way to determine the spiritual State of other Men. Now this Duty is so plain, that one would think there should be no Need of insisting much upon it; and yet it is so slighted or neglected, that it can't be too earnestly pressed on the Consciences of Christians, especially before and at their Approaches to the Holy Communion, when the great Duty of Self-examination is more particularly required, and ought to be seriously put in Practice by every one that desires to partake of the Benefits of *Christ's* Death and Passion in that solemn Ordinance. *The Way and Means thereto*, as our Church declares, *is to examine our Lives and Conversations by the Rule of God's Commandments.* By following this Method, we shall soon perceive and know, whether we sincerely love our Blessed Saviour, or not; since none can be said to do so, who do not observe his Words and keep his Commandments. And if, upon Inquiry, we find this to be our own Case, in Whole or in Part, it will be high

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Time for us to awake out of Sleep, and endeavour in good earnest to attain that great Christian Virtue, without which we can't reasonably hope to recommend ourselves to the Favour and Acceptance of our most merciful and ever-blessed Redeemer. For if we don't really love him, the great Lover of Souls, how can we expect to be loved by him? If we don't serve him as we ought, how can we hope to be saved by him? If we are not duly affected with all those great Things he has done for us already, how can we think to be made Partakers of those inestimable Blessings he has promised us hereafter? His *Loving-kindness is better than Life itself*. If we did really believe and esteem it as such, we should think nothing too much to do or suffer, in order to obtain it. Yet *all* he requires, *all* that he demands of us, as a Testimony of our Love to him, and as the Condition of our own Salvation, is to *keep his Commandments*; and *his Commandments are not grievous*. Having thus shewn that the Love of God is the great Principle of Obedience, and that a sincere Obedience is the only sure Sign of having the Love of God, I proceed now, under my

Second

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Second general Head, to consider our Saviour's Promise in the latter Part of the Text, which implies, that they who manifest their Love by such an Obedience, are peculiarly entitled to the Divine Favour and Benediction: — *And my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our Abode with him.* In other Places of Scripture, the Love of God to us is made the *Motive* and Encouragement to incline our Love to him. But here it is mention'd as the *Reward* of our Love; that is, if we love the *Son*, and testify our Love by keeping his Commandments, we are then assured that we shall be loved by God the *Father*. For 'tis *Christ* that speaks this to us — *If a Man love me, he will keep my Words, and my Father will love him.* It will therefore be proper under this Head to consider, in the *first* place, that the only sure Way to procure the Love of God the Father, is to love our Saviour *Christ*. 'Tis not sufficient to profess our Love of God in general: We must in particular testify our high Esteem and Affection for his blessed Son, whom he sent into the World to save Sinners. *And if God spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all; and if the*

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Son spared not himself, but freely offered his Life as a Ransom for our Souls, we must be utterly inexcusable, and even without natural Affection, if we do not return him the small Tribute of Love, Praise, and Adoration, for all the mighty Benefits he hath done unto us, As he is of the same Nature and Essence with the Father, Partaker of the same Glory, Attributes, and Perfections, he is equally entitled to the same Veneration and Love. And as we are commanded to love God *above all Things*, because there is nothing good and excellent, but is derived from him, who is the Fountain of all Excellency, Goodness and Perfection; so are we obliged to love our blessed Redeemer with the same Kind and Degree of Affection, not with an inferiour and subordinate, but with a supreme and superlative Love, as he has given the highest and greatest Demonstrations of his Love to us, as he is the Author of eternal Salvation, and Joint-Author with the Father of all the Good we now do, or ever can enjoy. And therefore as he told his Disciples, *He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father*; so we may say in this Case, *He that loves him, loves the Father*. And indeed none can be said truly to love the Father,
wh^o

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who does not sincerely love the Son, who is *the Brightness of his Glory, and the express Image of his Person.* And accordingly St. John makes this a distinguishing Mark and Effect of our loving the Father— *And every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him.* But farther, our blessed Saviour is to be served, loved, and obeyed, not only on Account of his natural Excellencies and Perfections, or only in regard of what he is in himself, or with respect to us; but likewise because 'tis the Will and Pleasure of the Father, that he should be so served, loved, and obeyed. Therefore *when he brought his First-begotten into the World, He said, and let all the Angels of God worship him.* Therefore was all Judgment committed to him, *that all Men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. And he that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father which sent him.* God the Father is so far from thinking it any Diminution to his own Honour to have his only Son adored, loved, and praised by all his Creatures, jointly and equally with himself; that on the contrary, he esteems and resents it as an Injury and Dishonour done to himself, if we withdraw

or

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or refuse to pay the same Honour, Love and Obedience to his Son; which however he could not, consistently with his Justice and Veracity, have expected or demanded of us, if his Son had not been of the same divine Nature with himself. On the other hand, he that loveth the Son is sure at the same time to be loved by the Father, as our Lord declares in the Text, and the Words foregoing:—*If a Man love me, he will keep my Words, and my Father will love him.*—Again, *He that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father.* And did we know and consider what it is to be beloved by God, how great the Advantage, how glorious the Privilege, how full of Comfort, and how sure a Pledge and Earnest of everlasting Felicity, we should make it the main Care and Concern of our Lives to serve and please our Maker and Redeemer. For, to be beloved of God, is to be under the more immediate Care and Protection of the great Governour of the World, to be under the Directions of his Counsel, or the Favour of his fatherly Correction, to be under the Guidance of his Spirit, and the Disposals of his Providence, which makes Men safe in the midst of Danger, and secure
of

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of Support and Comfort in a Time of Trial and Adversity. For *all Things work together for good to them that love God*, and that are beloved by him; not only *this* or *that* Particular, not only the more remarkable Passages and Occurrences of their Lives, but *all Things* without Exception; all Accidents and Events whatsoever, whether of the prosperous or adverse Kind, are so ordered and disposed by his over-ruling Power, that some way or other they shall tend to promote their spiritual and eternal Good. This is the great Security of the Lovers of God, that whatever their Condition be, and whatever may befall them in this Life, they have this comfortable Assurance still to sustain them, that *all Things work together for their good*; that nothing can fall out by the Appointment or Permission of God, but what he can, and will in the End, turn to their Benefit and Advantage. Nor are they thus favoured only with respect to *external* Things, or outward Accidents; but they have likewise a Promise of an *inward* Support and Consolation, yea, of an holy Communion with God himself, as our Saviour assures us in the Words of my Text—
We will come unto him, and make our Abode with

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with him. Which is the greatest Privilege that Christians can enjoy in this World. A Privilege that we can never too highly esteem, or too dearly purchase. For how great is the Favour, and how great the Condescension, for God to *come unto us, and make his Abode with us!* We vile sinful Creatures, that have nothing in ourselves to recommend us to the Divine Favour, nothing that can give us any Grounds to hope for so mighty a Condescension, could scarce have *Faith* enough to believe this gracious Promise, did not Truth itself assure us, that this is the real happy Case of every one that loves God, and is beloved by him—*We will come unto him, and make our Abode with him.* Those that have had any Experience of this, have little or no need to have it explained to them; and those who never knew experimentally what it is to have Communion with God, can't be made duly sensible of it, by any Explanation that can be given. However, that none may be discouraged, and that all may be invited and induced to seek after God, to love and obey him, I shall endeavour, in some few Particulars, to give you some little Apprehension of this great and comfortable Promise. The Words import

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port these two Things in general, an occasional Visitation, and a constant Residence. *First*, Our Saviour here promises the sincere Christian, that he shall be graciously visited by himself and by his Father—*We will come unto him*: which Visitation implies a Readiness and Purpose on God's Part to afford all seasonable Succour and Relief, or a suitable Supply of Ghostly Strength in all the needful Times of Trouble. And this is promised before-hand, that we may know and consider from whence cometh our Help, and duly acknowledge the Favour and Bounty of him, whose Strength is at any time made perfect in our Weakness. Whenever therefore we find ourselves strengthen'd with Might in the inner Man, and enabled to grapple with Trials and Temptations; whenever we perceive in ourselves a greater Aversion to Evil, and a stronger Disposition to Virtue and Goodness; that we are less fearful of temporal Evils, and more cautious to avoid those that are eternal; more careful to please God, and less solicitous to please ourselves; more resigned to his blessed Will, and better reconciled to the Duties and Difficulties of our holy Religion; we may then be assured of the Divine Visitation, and
that

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that God has vouchsafed to *come unto us*. For tho' our own Endeavours must not be wanting, yet these are not sufficient to work such Changes and Alterations in our Souls; which therefore must be ascribed to the Free-Grace and Bounty of God. *Secondly*, God may be said more particularly to *come unto Men*, when he gives them greater Inclinations, and more frequent Opportunities, to serve and attend him, in the sacred Offices of Religion. Every Opportunity of serving God is a Talent, a Favour, and a Privilege, which we ought to improve, and are accountable for. But 'tis still a much greater Favour to be endued with an Inclination to make a right Use of such blessed Opportunities. Which Inclination is the Effect of God's Love to us, and a Token of his special Presence with us, as our Saviour himself assures us in these Words — *No Man can come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him*; or, as 'tis afterwards expressed, *except it were given him of my Father*. From whence it appears, that Faith in *Christ*, and Love towards *Christ*, are the Gift of God, and both the Means and the Pledges of his gracious Visitation of us. We can't serve God, as we ought, without a pious Inclination; and we can't be endued with this pious Inclination,

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clination, unless it please God to work it in us. But if this be our Case, it may be asked, that since we have no Power of ourselves to incline our own Wills, or to dispose our own Hearts to Piety and Goodness, how can we serve God, as he expects and requires? To this I answer, that 'tis the same Thing in Effect, whether this Power be of ourselves, or conferr'd upon us by God, so long as we have such a Power. And in order to obtain this Power or pious Disposition, nothing more is wanting on our Parts, than Care and Diligence, or the doing what we are able, and putting ourselves in the Way of God's Grace. We may find perhaps in ourselves a strong Aversion, a Reluctance, an Unwillingness to religious Duties. We may feel a Languor, a Deadness, a Heaviness upon the Spirits, a strange Incapacity, or Indisposedness of Mind for spiritual Exercises and Employments. And 'tis *necessary* that we should feel and perceive all this, that so we may be duly sensible of our own natural Weakness and Insufficiency, and know from whence cometh all our Help. But then if we offer some Violence to our natural Aversions, as we ought to do; if we resolve to persist in our Duty, and endeavour to serve
God,

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God, tho' we may seem to reap no present Benefit or Comfort from it, and tho' we have not that Warmth of Devotion, or Fervency of Spirit, or close Recollection of Thought, that we wish and desire and labour to have, we may be sure that God will not be wanting on his Part, to bless and prosper such Diligence and Sincerity. For when he has made Men sufficiently sensible of their natural Weakness, then is his usual Time to let them know and feel what 'tis to be endued with a divine Strength. Then he is ready to *come unto them*, and to manifest himself unto them, to lead them in the right Way, and to instruct them in the Things that belong to their Peace. Let us then, as St. *James* exhorts us, *draw nigh unto God, and he will draw nigh unto us*. Let us only be careful to do what we are able, and then God will enable us to do what he requires, or at least what he will graciously accept. *Thirdly*, God may be said to *come unto us*, when he helps to improve those good Dispositions and virtuous Inclinations he had before bestow'd upon us. There is a great Variety in the *Degrees* as well as in the *Kinds* of Virtue: And God's Method, in training Men up to a State of Perfection, is to lead them on gradually,

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gradually, by leisurely progressive Steps, from one Degree of Goodness to another. As *his Commandments are exceeding broad*; so, in Proportion, the Measures of our Obedience are, in a manner, unlimited and boundless, and *we know no End thereof*. When we have done all that we are able, we must still say, that we have done much less than the Law in strictness requires. And when we have gone as far as we think we can in the Ways of Holiness, we have still a great deal farther to go. But whether we have only just begun, or made some Progress in our Christian Course, 'tis God, in both Cases, *that worketh in us both to will and to do, of his good Pleasure*. And his Design in *coming to us*, and bestowing spiritual Gifts upon us, is not wholly to extinguish or extirpate Nature, but to mend and correct, or to graft and build upon it; and by the additional Aids and Ornaments of the one, to improve, exalt, and perfect the other. The Case of the Apostles will make this very plain. When our Blessed Lord made them the Promise contained in the Text, they were then, for the most Part, in their *natural or moral* State; but after this Promise was fulfilled to them, and he and his Father had come unto them, and made their Abode with

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them, they were then properly in their *Christian* or *spiritual* State. By this Communion with God, their Minds were transform'd, and the Divine Image renewed upon their Souls; and by means of this, they differ'd from their *former selves*, as much or more than they differ'd from *other* Men. While they continued in their *natural* State, they were tinctured with Pride and Envy, began to be aspiring and ambitious, dream'd of nothing but the temporal Grandeur of their *Messiah*, and contend-ed amongst themselves, *which of them should be the greatest*. But in their *Christian* State, or after *Christ* had fulfilled his Promise to them, in coming to them, and making his *Abode with them*, we find them aspiring after nothing but a Conformity to the Image of their Saviour in Suffering and Patience, trampling on all the Poms and Vanities of this World, ascribing nothing to themselves, but all to the Grace of God, giving the Right-hand of Fellowship to one another, condescending to the meanest Persons, and to the meanest Offices for their Sake, and becoming (as one of them expresses it) *all Things to all Men, if by any Means they might save some*. Again, in their *moral* State, they were naturally

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ly of a brave and generous Spirit: But then they were withal of too sanguine a Temper, and too apt to resent Injuries; and therefore were presently for calling down Fire from Heaven upon the unhospitable *Samaritans*. But after the Divine Visitation, and the Residence of the Spirit with them, they were all Meekness, Gentleness, and Forgiveness, disposed to bless and not to curse, unwilling to give the least Offence, and ready to receive the greatest. In their *former* State, they undertook and promised great Things, and really meant what they promised, being zealous for their Lord, and ready to do and suffer any thing for his Sake: But then relying wholly on their own Strength (which they soon found to be nothing but Weakness) they were sometimes too confident, and sometimes too timorous, and are monitory Examples to us of human Frailty and Presumption. But when visited from above, and replenished with the Gifts and Graces of the Spirit, they acted then the truly prudent and courageous Part, and would neither court nor decline Dangers. From these few Instances you may easily perceive, in what Sense we are to understand our Saviour's Pro-

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mise in the Text, or what it is to have Communion with God; which is then completed and perfected, when he vouchsafes his constant Residence, and condescends to make his Abode with us: Which is the only Thing that can secure our Perseverance. God *visits* and is kind to *All*, to the *Bad* as well as the Good; and often invites, importunes, and inclines them to repent of their Sins, and to amend their Ways, and pursues them with Promises of Pardon, and is always ready to receive them upon their Return. But he makes his *Abode* only with the *Faithful*, and with them only so long as they continue faithful. If they are wanting in their Duty, or turn from him, he will forsake them, at least for a Time, or till they have recovered themselves. The only Way then to maintain Communion with God, or to have him constantly abiding with us, is to be steadfast and unmoveable in the Faith, and always abounding in the Work of the Lord, and to go on with Vigour and Resolution, and without Interruption, or with as little as possible, in a steady Course of Virtue and Holiness. If we do so, or use our best Endeavours to this End, we may assure ourselves,
that

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that God will never leave us, nor forsake us, but will *guide us with his Counsel* here, and *after that receive us unto Glory.*

Now to God the FATHER, God the SON, and God the HOLY GHOST, three Persons, and one GOD, be ascribed, as is most due, all Honour and Praise, Obedience and Thanksgiving, now and for evermore. Amen.

SERMON IX.

The Order and Connexion of our
Saviour's Beatitudes.

MATT. V. 1, 2, 3.

*And seeing the Multitude, he went
up into a Mountain; and when he
was set, his Disciples came unto
him; and he opened his Mouth,
and taught them, saying, Blessed
are the Poor in Spirit; for their's
is the Kingdom of Heaven.*

OUR Blessed Saviour's Divine Sermon
on the Mount, contain'd in this and
the two following Chapters, is what
deserves our closest Attention, and most seri-
ous Consideration; as 'tis the End of the
Law, and the Sum of the Gospel, a compleat
System

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System of Christian Morality, or a Compendium of all the chief and essential Branches of Christian Practice. And as the Law on Mount *Sinai* was comprised in ten Commandments; so the whole of the Gospel is here comprised in eight Precepts, commonly called the eight *Beatitudes*, from the *Blessing* with which each Duty is introduced, contrary to the Promulgation of the *Jewish* Institution. For as the Law was delivered in dreadful Pomp and Majesty, and with terrible Sanctions, with Threatenings and Curses against the Violaters of it; so the Gospel was published by our mild and merciful Redeemer, the Mediator of the New Covenant between God and Man, in the most agreeable and engaging Manner, by annexing particular Rewards to particular Duties, pronouncing a Blessing upon all those, who would comply with his Commands, and laying no other Commands upon them, than what were really conducive to their Happiness. By which Means he endeavours to win them to Obedience by the Reasonableness and Agreeableness of his Precepts, and by the Consideration of their own Interest. For thus he begins his Divine Sermon —
Blessed are the Poor in Spirit; for their's is

the Kingdom of Heaven. Which Words I propose to consider, not as they stand by themselves, but with relation to the Context. For 'tis not my Intention at present to treat of each or either of the Beatitudes separately and distinctly, but to offer some general Hints and Observations, for the better understanding the admirable Wisdom and Contrivance of our Saviour's Discourse in this Place. To which End, I shall (1.) endeavour to prove that the first Duty or Virtue here required, is most fitly placed at the Head of the rest, as 'tis the Foundation of all that follow, and indeed of every Duty and Virtue required by the Gospel, (2.) I shall consider the admirable Order and Connexion of all the rest, or what Dependance they have successively upon one another. And,

First, I am to shew, that the first Duty or Virtue here required, *viz. Poverty of Spirit*, or Humility, is most fitly placed at the Head of all the rest, as 'tis the Foundation of all that follow, and of all that are required by the Gospel. 'Tis a Duty indispensably necessary for all Persons and at all Times; for the meanest as well as the highest; and therefore our Saviour directs this Discourse to the common
People

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People that attended his Preaching — *And seeing the Multitude, he went up into a Mountain; and after his Disciples were come unto him, he opened his Mouth and taught them, saying* — And then 'tis so necessary at all Times, that without the Practice of *Humility*, we can neither begin, nor carry on, nor perfect any good Work. For *Humility*, according to the Apostle, is thinking of ourselves not more highly than we ought to think, but soberly, meanly and poorly, as we are weak, dependent, and sinful Creatures, and receive all the Good we have from the Hands of God; and so is doing Justice to him and to ourselves: 'Tis acknowledging ourselves to be what we are in Truth and Reality. Whereas *Pride* is a downright Lie, or a bold Defiance of the Truth. For what can be so, if not for a Man to think himself to be something, when in truth he is nothing? Can there be two greater Opposites, two greater Extremes, than *Something* and *Nothing*? And yet this is the very Truth of our Case. For we are nothing in or of ourselves, but a Compound of Ignorance, Infirmary and Sin. Upon this Account it is that *Humility*, which is here called by our Saviour *Poverty of Spirit*, was ever esteemed as the Root of all Virtue. For as 'tis the
Root

Root which sustains and supports the Tree, and when that is pluckt up, the Branches instantly wither and die away; so every Virtue whatsoever is instantly lost, if it does not grow up and continue in the Root of Humility. Therefore as *Pride*, according to the wise Man, *is the Beginning and Root of all Sin*; so *Humility* may as justly be said to be the Foundation and Root of all Virtue. Faith indeed is commonly supposed to be the Foundation of the spiritual Building: But this does not hinder, but that *Humility* may be properly called a Foundation too. For in all Buildings there is a double Foundation, a *natural* and *artificial* one. If Men would build to any purpose, they must dig deep, and clear the Ground, and remove all the Rubbish out of the Way, till they come to something firm and rocky: And then the first Corner-stone, and the rest of the Foundation of the Building is to be laid. Now this Metaphor or Comparison serves excellently well to denote the Uses and Properties both of Faith and Humility, as the Foundations of all Virtue. For *first* 'tis the Office of *Humility* to clear the Soil, to search deep into the Heart, and to cast out all that is feeble and loose, or useless and offensive. That is, we must acknowledge,

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ledge, that the Power of Man is mere Weakness, and that his Wisdom is mere Foolishness with God; and therefore not fit to build upon. No, we are to place no Confidence in ourselves, to put no Trust in our own Righteousness, which is no other than Filth and Rubbish in the Sight of God. And by thus digging deep into the sandy Foundation of our own Hearts, we shall open and clear the Way for laying that firm Foundation, that chief Corner-stone, which is *Christ* our Lord; *the Lord our Righteousness*, by whom alone we can be justified and saved. And this indeed is the *principal* Foundation. But then as the clearing the Way to this is necessary, and as the doing this is the Property of Humility, therefore *that* also is not improperly called a Foundation. And how far it is so, I shall now consider more distinctly, with respect to the Graces and Virtues here recommended and required by our Saviour.

The *first* of which is this — *Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted.* Here *Mourning* signifies a godly Sorrow for our own Sins and for the Sins of others, and as a Consequence of both, for the Miseries and Calamities of this Life. And this is the
proper

proper and genuine Fruit of *Humility*. For as Humility is founded in the Knowledge of ourselves; so every one that knows himself, as he ought to know, will find abundant Matter for pious Mourning and serious Lamentation. But they that live in Ignorance of themselves, and of their own sinful State, and have no serious Regard for the abounding Iniquity of the Age they live in, will be apt to confound Times and Seasons, to invert the Order both of Nature and Grace, to laugh when they should mourn, to rejoice at the greatest Occasions of Sorrow, to triumph in the Midst of Danger, and to be angry with those that can't be persuaded to be as unconcerned and indolent as themselves: And all this for want of knowing themselves, and their own spiritual Condition, their low imperfect State of Goodness, their slippery Standing, their Hazard of Salvation, the Wickedness of the World, and the manifold Perils they lie continually exposed to. But the Man who seriously reflects on his own sinful State, his small Attainments, his Neglect of improving the Talents and Opportunities that have been afforded him, and the growing Iniquity of the present Times, is in the best Disposition to offer unto God that
Sacrifice,

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Sacrifice, which is always well-pleasing to him, even *the Sacrifice of a broken and contrite Heart*, which he has promised *not to despise*. So necessary is an humble Sense of the real State we are in, to work in us true Contrition, to correct and temper our inordinate Passions and Affections, and to render our imperfect Services acceptable to God.

Secondly, The next Duty or Beatitude that follows in Order, is *Meekness*——*Blessed are the Meek; for they shall inherit the Earth.* And of this amiable Virtue, *Humility* is likewise the Foundation. For Meekness consists in a due Government and Regulation of the Passion of Anger; and as a Consequence of this, in a quiet suffering of Injuries and Afflictions, Contumely and Contempt; in bearing with others Failings and Infirmities, in a Backwardness to take Offence, and a ready Disposition to Peace and Reconciliation, in abhorring and avoiding all Manner of Revenge, in a Willingness rather to suffer Wrong, than to right ourselves by Contention and Strife, and so committing ourselves and our Affairs *to him who judgeth righteously*. This is a short Description of the Nature and Properties of *Meekness*. And 'tis obvious and observable

observable at first Sight, how greatly Humility must conduce to the Production and Support of this Virtue. For he that is duly sensible of his own Sins and Failings, will not be soon or immoderately offended at the Failings of others. He who is lowly in his own Eyes, and knows what he has deserved at the Hands of a holy and righteous God, can't be surpris'd to meet with ill Treatment from the Hands of Men. Meekness and Patience are the natural and necessary Effects of a just and humble Sense of our own Demerits. We can't reflect upon the vast immense Debt we stand charged with, for our Offences against Almighty God, represented in the Parable as no less than *ten thousand Talents*, without being willing and inclin'd to forgive our offending Brethren their small Trespasses in Comparison against us, which at most are said to amount to no more than *a hundred Pence*. Let the Injuries therefore we suffer be never so many, or never so great in themselves, *Humility* will teach us in what Light we ought to consider them, and *Meekness* will enable us to sustain and overcome them. In short, Humility and Meekness are such constant Companions, and so inseparably united, that he who has not the
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one, may well be presumed to want the other. And therefore our Blessed Saviour joins them both together, when he proposes himself as a Pattern to his Followers — *Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in Heart, and ye shall find Rest unto your Souls.*

Thirdly, The next great Duty or Beatitude is thus expressed — *Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after Righteousness; for they shall be filled.* Now nothing can be plainer, than that Humility must lay the Foundation for this Virtue also. For this supposes us sensible of our Weaknesses and Wants; otherwise we could not be earnest or desirous to have them supplied: And this is the Property of Humility. But if we think or suppose ourselves *righteous already*, we can't then *hunger and thirst after Righteousness*. We must *feel* our own Emptiness, before we can in good Earnest desire to be *filled*. The Graces of God's Holy Spirit (like the Widow's Cruise of Oil, which continued running no longer than she could find empty Vessels) are imparted only to those, that empty themselves of all Worth, that disclaim all Pretences to Merit in themselves, and trust only to God's Mercy through *Christ* for Grace and Acceptance. 'Tis
the

the Duty and Office of Humility to cleanse and clear the Heart from all Presumption and Self-confidence, from all Trust or Dependence upon our own Strength. And when this is effectually done, we are then prepared and disposed (and not before) to practise the Duty here recommended. When we are thoroughly acquainted with our own natural Insufficiency, we shall then apply, with Earnestness and Constancy, for Succour and Assistance from above. *Nature* has no Need to be reminded of *her* Wants; nor would *Grace* neither, if we duly attended to her Calls, and did not suffer ourselves to be diverted from them by other Things. If we thoroughly understood our Want of Grace, and sensibly felt the Want of it, we should be eager and forward to comply with all those Opportunities and Means, that are appointed for the Conveyance of it into our Hearts; particularly that most excellent Means, the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, in partaking of which, those that *hunger and thirst after Righteousness* are sure to be filled; so far at least, as may be sufficient for their present Need.

Fourthly, Another Duty here required and recommended by our Saviour, is *Mercifulness*—

Blessed

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Blessed are the Merciful; for they shall obtain Mercy: A Virtue, that has the strongest Motives to recommend it, and that is most pathetically and forcibly urged upon us by the Gospel of *Christ*; but which none can rightly understand or practise, as he ought, who is not, in some good Measure, endued with *Poverty of Spirit*, or Humility. For 'tis our own Want and Experience of Mercy, that must teach us to shew Mercy to others. He that is duly sensible, and seriously considers, how much he stands indebted to infinite Mercy for the Comforts of this Life and the Hopes of a better; and what astonishing Means and Methods have been used to bring him into a State and Capacity of Salvation, can never find in his Heart to be unmerciful and implacable to the greatest of Enemies, or for the worst of Injuries; but will rather gladly embrace all Opportunities and Occasions of testifying, how great a Value he sets upon the Mercies of God and *Christ*, by shewing something of the like Mercy to his Fellow-Christians. So useful, you see, and necessary is Humility for every Part and Division of the spiritual Building, neither of which could be carried on, or begun, unless Humility prepare

the Way, and clear the Foundation; as may still more fully and evidently appear by considering the three remaining Beatitudes.

Fifthly then, The next in Order is Purity of Heart — *Blessed are the pure in Heart; for they shall see God.* Now this is not a single Grace or Virtue, but a complex one, or a Complication of Graces, and comprehends at least one Half of *practical* Religion. 'Tis the same in Proportion, as the Tree is to the Fruit; and 'tis our Saviour's own Comparison. That which is *produced*, must be of the same Kind and Quality with that which *produceth*. And according to the good or bad Disposition of the Heart, so Men speak, and so they act. For *a good Tree bringeth forth good Fruit, and a corrupt Tree bringeth forth evil Fruit. Wherefore by their Fruits ye shall know them.* Now Purity of Heart implies a constant Intention to please God, and a constant Care to abstain from all such vain and sinful Thoughts, Imaginations, and Desires, as pollute and defile the Soul, and render it odious and loathsome in the Sight of an holy and jealous God, who is of *purser Eyes than to behold Iniquity*, and *requireth Truth in the inward Parts*. But none can presume to be
thus

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thus *pure in Heart*, who are not likewise *poor in Spirit*, or endued with a Spirit of Humility. For 'tis the Office and Property of Humility, to search and find out every Deformity of the Soul, and every Thing that defileth. And since the Nature of Man is miserably distorted and polluted ever since the first Contagion deriv'd from *Adam's* Transgression; it is Work enough for one single Virtue to examine and discover the several foul Branches of this original Taint and Corruption, and then to present and deliver them over, as it were, to the Discipline and Correction of that other Virtue, which is here called *Purity of Heart*, whose Business it is to cleanse the Soul from all the Filthiness of Sin, to remove whatever is vile and offensive, and to cast out what is hurtful and pernicious; and so by Degrees to prepare the Heart for the Residence of the Holy Spirit, and to make it such a fit and cleanly Habitation as the God of Holiness may not disdain to dwell in. The Work of Humility, in this Case, is like that of a *Man's* *beholding his natural Face in a Glass*; and that of Purity of Heart, like his Care afterwards, by the Help of that, to wash away any Spots or Stains, and to rectify whatever is amiss.

For so the *pure in Heart*, by the Help of Humility, take the same Pains to cleanse and beautify the inner Man, as others do to deck and adorn the outward. Humility is a nice and curious Observer both of the outward Action, and of what passes within; and searches and spies out many Failings and Defects, which Pride or Partiality would easily overlook. And 'tis Purity of Heart that renews the Image of God upon the Soul, or that prepares Men to be Partakers of the Divine Nature. *If any Man have not the Spirit of Christ*, says the Apostle, *he is none of his*. But none can have the Spirit of *Christ*, who is not *pure in Heart*. For into an impure Soul the Holy Spirit will not enter. 'Tis therefore the Part of Humility to prepare the Way for his Reception, and by proper Acts of Contrition to invite him into the Soul. Neither the Poor in Spirit, nor the Pure in Heart, pretend to Perfection, or to any Merit or Righteousness of their own. On the contrary, they freely acknowledge themselves to be subject to the same Failings, and to the same Passions with other Men; but then they labour to mortify and subdue them; and their Labour will not be in vain. For they that are humble
will

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will certainly in Time become Pure in Heart; and they that are Pure in Heart have the Promise to *see God*, to be enlighten'd and sanctified by him in this Life, and to behold him Face to Face in the Life to come. Now as this Beatitude particularly regards God and ourselves: So,

Sixthly, The next has respect unto our Neighbours. — *Blessed are the Peace-makers; for they shall be called the Children of God.* But to live in Peace with others, and to make Peace among those that are at variance, requires a very humble and lowly State of Soul. No one is fit to be a Moderator in hot Disputes and fierce Contentions, but he that has learn'd to subdue his own Passions, and is able to bear Reproach and Contempt. The Reconciler of Differences generally comes in for a double Share of Anger or Hatred, and is almost sure to displease both Parties, for some Time at least, or till, by the Force of calm Reasoning and serious Persuasions, their Passions are cooled and begin to subside: And when these are somewhat silenced, then the still Voice of Reason and Religion may at last prevail, or at least will make Men more attentive to good Counsel, and more willing to hearken to

Terms of Accommodation. This is figured out to us, in a strong and lively Manner, by what God was pleased to transact and represent before the Prophet *Elijah*, who was commanded to go forth and stand upon the Mount before the Lord. And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong Wind rent the Mountains, and brake in pieces the Rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the Wind. And after the Wind an Earthquake; but the Lord was not in the Earthquake. And after the Earthquake a Fire; but the Lord was not in the Fire. And after the Fire a still small Voice. And it was so, when *Elijah* heard it, he wrapped his Face in his Mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the Cave. And behold there came a Voice unto him and said, what dost thou here, *Elijah*? Now to apply this in a moral Way, and to the present Case — The still small Voice that first awakened the Prophet (for before this he seemed not to be moved at the several frightful *Phænomena* that had passed before him) I say, this *still small Voice* is the Voice of *Humility*, in which alone God is to be found. But Storms and Tempests, Earthquakes and Lightnings, and their moral Antitypes,

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titypes, blustering Passions, furious Tempers, and great Commotions, are often suffered by God to be raised and brought about by the Agency of *the Prince of the Power of the Air, the Spirit that worketh in the Children of Disobedience.* And till these be laid, the *still small Voice* can't be heard; but when it is, the Divine Call will be attended to and obey'd. Let none then presume to be *Peace-makers*, or attempt to reconcile others, who can't stand out the Storms of Pride and Passion, or are not humble enough to submit to Contradiction, Calumny, and Reproach. And this brings me, in the

Seventh place, to consider the eighth and last Beatitude, and to prove that this likewise is founded in Humility — *Blessed are they which are persecuted for Righteousness-sake; for their's is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are ye when Men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of Evil against you falsely for my Sake: Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your Reward in Heaven; for so persecuted they the Prophets which were before you.* Now tho' this is an exalted and heroick Pitch of Virtue, yea, the Top and Perfection of all Christian Graces and Vir-

tues; yet even this highest Part of the spiritual Building could no more be raised, than any other Part, without the Foundation of *Humility*. For this teaches us, among other Things, to despise ourselves, and to abhor our own Vileness: It teaches us likewise to despise the World, and to be content to be despised by it, and to trust and hope in God alone. From this Account of Humility 'tis easy to see, how the *poor in Spirit* may rise by Degrees to that State of Christian Perfection, that is recommended by our Saviour in his last Beatitude. His Work, I may say, in this respect, is half done already. For he that has learnt to despise himself and to despise the World, that is, to think meanly of all Things here below, is prepared to undergo any Hardships for the Sake of God and a good Conscience. All that he may seem farther to need or require, is such a sedate and serene Temper and Constancy of Mind, and such a full Assurance of the Love and Favour of God, as may dispose a Man even to *rejoice in Tribulation*, and to take Pleasure in Sufferings. But even this highest Degree of Christian Fortitude or passive Virtue, the humble and patient Sufferer will be capable of attaining at length,

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length, by what is here proposed by our Lord as the great Motive to such Suffering, *namely*, the sure and bright Prospect of *an exceeding and eternal Weight of Glory*, with which the Sufferings of this present Time are not worthy to be compared. And therefore our Blessed Lord bids those that are *persecuted for Righteousness-sake*, not barely to be contented and patient, but to *rejoice and be exceeding glad*, because *great is their Reward in Heaven.*

Thus we see, what noble and magnificent Structures in Piety and Virtue may and have been raised upon that mean and contemptible Foundation in the Eye of the World, *Poverty of Spirit*, or Humility; which is the Ground-work of every other Beatitude, and indeed of every Duty and Virtue required by the Gospel: As it teaches us to acknowledge our sinful, weak, and dependent State, and infinite Demerits; to renounce all Merit and Righteousness of our own, and to trust entirely to the Merits and Righteousness of *Christ* for Pardon, Grace, and Salvation; and to ascribe the Honour of every Thing that is Praise-worthy in us to God, and to take the Shame of all
that

that is Blame-worthy to ourselves. And now I come, under my

Second general Head, to consider the Order and Connexion of the other Beatitudes, or what Dependence they have upon one another. For having cleared the Foundation, and taken a general View of the whole spiritual Building, it may now be proper to survey the several Parts, and to take a closer View of their mutual Coherence and Dependence upon each other. To which End I observe, first, that tho' the Virtues here recommended are of a mixt Nature, yet some relate more peculiarly to *God*, and others have a more immediate respect to our *Neighbour* and *ourselves*. Those that are allowed to relate more especially to God, are these four, *Mourning, Hungring and Thirsting after Righteousness, Purity of Heart, and Suffering for Righteousness-sake*. Those that relate more directly to Man, are *Meekness, Mercifulness, and Peaceableness*; with which we must join *Poverty of Spirit*, as the Mother-Virtue of all the rest, in both Kinds, or as partly respecting God, and partly our Neighbour and ourselves. Now those of the former Kind, or those relating to God, do truly, properly,

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perly, and naturally follow or infer each other; the first producing the second, and the second the third. Thus *mourning* for Sin, considering our present State, is in the first Place necessary: Then follows naturally, *hungering and thirsting after Righteousness*: After that, *Purity of Heart*, which is, in some Degree, the very Beatitude annex'd to that Grace: And, lastly, comes *Persecution for Righteousness-sake*, which is the Crown of all, not only for want of Opportunity to practise any higher Degree of Virtue, as in the Case of Martyrdom, but as including all that went before, and as we can't conceive any more exalted Degree of Virtue practicable by Men. For *greater Love hath no Man than this, that a Man lay down his Life for his Friend*. So that this surpasses even what the Angels themselves are capable of, who can *obey*, but not *suffer* for *Christ*. Then as to the Virtues relating more immediately to Man, there is likewise a necessary Dependence and strict Connexion between them. When the Passion of Anger is under due Government by *Meekness*, we are in a better Disposition to be *merciful*: When we have put on Bowels of *Mercy*, we shall be readily inclined to live *peaceably* ourselves,

selves, and to *promote* Peace among others. And the Reason why this Duty of *Peace-making* is mention'd last, and why no other Duty towards Man follows after this, seems to be, that as this Duty implies and presupposes the three foregoing, and therefore must be of a more eminent and exalted Nature (as the greater includes the less, and not the less the greater) so may it be highest in God's Esteem upon another Account, as most fitly representing the great Kindness and Office of our Blessed Saviour, as Mediator; who came to make Peace between Heaven and Earth, to reconcile God to Men, and Men to one another. Therefore is he emphatically stiled *our Peace*; and therefore was he usher'd into the World with this Angelical Hymn — *Glory to God in the Highest, on Earth Peace, Good-will towards Men.* And when he was departing out of the World, he left this as his last Legacy to his Disciples — *Peace I leave with you, my Peace I give unto you.* 2. I observe, that not only the Duties relating to God, and the Duties relating to Man, do respectively produce and support each other, in that most natural Order in which they are placed; but likewise that from each distinct Duty

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Duty respecting God, proceeds a particular Virtue relating to Man. Thus from *Mourning* 'tis an easy Descent to *Meekness*; this being the genuine Fruit and proper Result of true Christian Mourning. For he that is angry and displeased with himself (as every pious Mourner is and must be) will cease to be grieved or angry with his Brother. But this is not so strictly true on the other Side. For I know no such direct and immediate Influence that *Meekness* has upon *hungring and thirsting after Righteousness*, as *Mourning* has upon *Meekness*. Nor therefore does the Virtue required towards our Brother *directly* tend, but only *remotely* (as the Practice of any one Virtue will make us more disposed to the Practice of all Virtue in general) to produce the next Virtue towards God; but every Virtue towards God is naturally productive of the following Virtue towards Man. Thus *hungring and thirsting after Righteousness* will soon create and work in us a *merciful Temper*; since our Hungring and Thirsting to be filled with the Fruits of Righteousness, plainly presupposes our being very sensible of our own Emptiness, Wants, and Deficiencies, which will incline us to pity and be merciful to others:

Or,

Or, if by *Righteousness* we understand our appearing righteous before, or being acquitted and justified by God, then 'tis certain, that while we are earnestly desiring and seeking after this, there is no Instance of Mercy that we shall not be ready to exercise towards our Brethren. So of *Purity of Heart*, which is the Duty towards God; this does not depend upon the foregoing Duty towards Man, or proceed from Acts of *Tenderness* towards others, but rather from the Exercise of a proper and just *Severity* towards ourselves; and is the most ready, the most likely, and the most effectual Way or Means to the following Duty of *Peace-making*; to which nothing conduces more than a *pure Heart*, free from those Lusts and sensual Affections, which are the Seeds of Strife and Contention. And this is what St. Paul observes — *Whereas there be Divisions amongst you, are ye not carnal?* And so St. James — *From whence come Wars and Fightings amongst you? Come they not hence, even of your Lusts?* And 'tis observable, that this Apostle places these two in the very same Order that our Saviour does, and makes the former productive of the latter — *The Wisdom that is from above, is first pure, and then peaceable.*
Lastly,

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Lastly, Tho' there be no Virtue relating to Man, mentioned after *Persecution for Righteousness-sake*, as flowing from or produced by it; yet as 'tis a Testimony of the greatest Love to God, so is it attended with the greatest Charity to Men, the Charity of forgiving and praying for Enemies: Which has often had wonderful Effects, so as to convert Unbelievers, to strengthen the Faith of the Weak, to animate the Strong, and to verify that ancient Saying, — *The Blood of the Martyrs is the Seed of the Church.*

I have now finished what I design'd, with all the Brevity that the Copiousness of the Subject would allow; and among the many Inferences and Observations that may be made, I shall close all with these two very short ones upon what has been said. 1. I can't but observe the Folly and Indiscretion of those that would build up a Christian Practice without laying the Foundation in *Humility*, which is like a Man's building a House upon the Sand; the Consequence of which can be nothing but Ruin, as our Saviour observes in the Close of this Sermon on the Mount. Let us not then presume to think ourselves *holy* before we have learnt *Humility*, or that we *hunger and thirst*
after

after Righteousness before we have heartily mourned for our Sins, or that we can be *Peace-makers* without being *pure*, or prepared to suffer *Persecution for Righteousness-sake*, before we have practised, in some good Measure, all the foregoing Duties. 2. From hence we may safely examine the Truth of our Graces, and what Progress we have made in them. For since some are antecedent, and some consequent, some as the Cause, others as the Effect, we may be sure that we can't have the Effect, if we have not the Cause; we can't have the Fruit, if we have not the Root. In vain we pretend to be *merciful*, if we are not *meek*; in vain to be meek, if we never truly *mourn'd* for our Sins; in vain to be *Peace-makers*, unless we are *pure in Heart*, and free from those inordinate Passions and Affections, which are the great Disturbers of Society. And since God is a God of Order, and not of Confusion, and would have every Precept of his observed in its due Place and Season, I conclude with St. Paul's Advice concerning the *ceremonial* Part of Religion, which is as proper with respect to the *moral* — *Let all Things be done decently and in Order.*

Now to GOD the FATHER, &c.

PART

PART IV.

THE
SURE WAY
TO
Christian Perfection;

OR,
The Obligations, Means, and Motives

TO A
*Continued Progress and Perseverance
in Faith and Holiness,*

CONSIDER'D:
In Nine SERMONS,
Preach'd on several Occasions.

By SAMUEL JOHNSON, A.M. *Vicar
of Great Torrington.*

PART IV

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Of Great Torrington

LONDON

SERMON I.

The End and Design of CHRIST'S
giving himself for us, with respect
to Sin and Obedience.

TITUS ii. 14.

*Who gave himself for us, that he
might redeem us from all Iniquity,
and purify unto himself a peculiar
People, zealous of Good Works.*

THE Things which *Christ* undertook
and accomplished in the *Flesh*, were
not only great and stupendous in
themselves, but likewise attended with the
most beneficial and durable Consequences, and
full of the most gracious Designs and Purposes
for the Recovery and Restoration of the fallen
Race of Mankind. When God determin'd
to send his Son into the World, upon the
O 2 kindest

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kindest Message that ever was dispatched from Heaven, tho' he knew beforehand there would be too many that would withstand the clear Evidence that should be given, reject the gracious Offers that should be made, wilfully neglect so great Salvation, and render themselves unworthy of eternal Life; yet, at the same time he foreknew, that there would be in every Age a Number of faithful and well-disposed Persons, who would readily embrace and duly conform to the Precepts of *Christ*, and by a regular and holy Conversation, or by a sincere and timely Repentance, endeavour to answer the Ends of his coming into the World. These Ends of his coming, and of all that he did and suffer'd, while upon Earth, are here by the Apostle reduced to three general Heads. For, *first*, He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all Iniquity. *Secondly*, That he might purify to himself a peculiar People. And, *thirdly*, that this peculiar People might distinguish and manifest themselves as such, by being zealous of Good Works.

But before I explain these Heads distinctly, it will be proper to consider, in few Words, the Manner or Meaning of his giving himself
for

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for us. Now in some Parts of the Gospel it is said, that *God* gave his Son; and here, and in other Places, that the *Son* gave himself for us. For a right understanding of these two Assertions, we may observe, that God the Father did not by any Act of supreme Authority oblige the Son to take upon him our Nature, and in that Nature to suffer for us; nor did the Son, in coming into the World, and assuming our Nature, only submit to a superior Command; for then he could not freely have offered himself. No; as there was no Force or Constraint on the one Part, so neither was there any natural or necessary Obligation on the other. But the whole Affair of our Salvation was contrived, carried on, and compleated, by the joint Counsel and Concurrence of all the three Persons in the Sacred Trinity, and more particularly by a mutual Compact and Agreement of the Father and the Son. For, to speak after the Manner of Men, we may suppose that God the Father, out of his own mere Motion and free Grace, propounded to the Son the Redemption of a sinful World, by an Exchange of Person and Punishment, and by offering to accept of a suitable Satisfaction to his offended Justice, upon

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certain Terms and Conditions, to be afterwards required on Man's Part; and that then the Son did freely and readily, without any other impulsive Cause, than that of his own mere Mercy and tender Love towards Mankind, accept of his Father's Proposal, and condescended to become the Substitute or Representative of Mankind, and to sustain the Character and to suffer the Punishment of Sinners, in order to save and redeem those who should believe and acknowledge him as their Saviour, and comply with the Terms and Conditions of Salvation. From this brief Account you may observe, that the Father first gave his Son as a Sacrifice for the Sins of the World, and then accepted of the Sacrifice which himself had provided: And that the Son first gave himself for us, and then offer'd himself without Spot unto God, by way of Ransom for those Souls, that lay under the Curse of the Law, and under the Sentence of Condemnation; by way of Atonement and Expiation for those Sins, which had deserved and incurred an eternal Vengeance; and by way of Purchase and Recovery of that Freedom and Happiness, which had been lost and forfeited by Disobedience. Had not the Son been
equal

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equal to the Father in Nature and Essence, the Oblation of himself, on such an Account, had been unworthy of God, and insufficient for the Ends for which it was offered. But being *God* by Nature, and yet capable of becoming *Man*, he was, all things considered, the *only* Person in the World that was able to undertake and accomplish the great Work of our Redemption. He is therefore said to be willing to suffer, and *mighty to save*, to give *his Life a Ransom for many*, to give *himself for us an Offering and a Sacrifice unto God for a sweet-smelling Savour*, to have *offer'd himself without Spot*, and *now once in the end of the World* to have *appear'd to put away Sin by the Sacrifice of himself*, tho' he was the *Lamb slain*, in the Divine Purpose, *from the Foundation of the World*. All which, and the like Expressions, do plainly denote, and undeniably prove, that *Christ's* Sacrifice of himself was a Free-will-offering, pre-ordained and accepted of God as such, fully commensurate to the Guilt of Man's Sin, abundantly sufficient to satisfy the Justice of God, and to answer all those other gracious Ends and Designs, for which it was offered.

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And what those are, the Apostle declares in the Text, and sums up under three Heads.

The *first* of which is, that *Christ* offered or gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all Iniquity. The World perhaps would have thought themselves more obliged to him, if he had come to redeem them from temporal Evils and Calamities, and the manifold Pressures and Afflictions of this mortal State, or promised to make them Victorious and Triumphant in all Dangers, and over all Opposition. But this was a Redemption unsuitable to their present Condition, and unequal to the great Undertaking of the Son of God. He *might*, 'tis true, have done all this, and abundantly more for us. For he that could do the *greater*, was certainly able to do the *less*. But he had higher Views and nobler Designs. He came to visit the Spirits in Prison, and to redeem lost Souls. And one of these Souls, in his own Account, is of more Value than all the World. Of what Value then must that Sacrifice be, that was able to redeem a World of Souls? As all Mankind were sold under Sin, and held captive by Satan, there was none that could purchase and procure our Freedom from this Bondage and Slavery,

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very, but the Son of God; nor even *he*, without giving himself for us. And therefore did he give himself for us, that he might redeem us, not from *present*, but from *future* Misery, not from *this* or *that* particular Sin, or the more dangerous and destructive Vices of human Nature, but from *all Iniquity*. His Aim and Design was our Perfection and Happiness; which, in the Nature of the Thing, could not be effected without a Discharge and Deliverance from *all Sin*; not indeed all at once, but at several Times, and in different Measures and Degrees. Had our Saviour left us under the Guilt, or indulged us the Liberty of *any one Sin*, neither our Happiness nor our Obedience could have been secured. But he gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from *all Iniquity*, *first*, by delivering us from the Guilt and Punishment, and *secondly*, from the Power and Dominion of Sin.

First, Our Blessed Saviour gave himself for us, that he might deliver us from the *Guilt* of Sin; that is, from our Obnoxiousness to Punishment. For as *Sin is the Transgression of the Law*, it deserves and stands charged with Punishment; and what the peculiar Punishment, threaten'd to Sin, is, the Scripture informs

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forms us in these Words — *The Wages of Sin is Death*; by which is meant the Death of the Soul as well as of the Body, or the suffering of an eternal Vengeance. And therefore tho' temporal Evils and Calamities are, in some measure, a Punishment for Sin, and that both naturally and judicially; yet our Saviour's Sacrifice was chiefly, if not wholly, designed to redeem us from that Punishment which will be eternal. As to the Evils and Miseries of this present Life, as they are not inconsistent with a State of Pardon and Grace; so are they generally intended and inflicted by God, in order to prevent the more formidable Evils of the World to come. When therefore we affirm, that *Christ* died to redeem us from the Guilt of Sin, or to free us from Punishment, we must be supposed to mean no more, than that the Life he laid down, the Blood he shed, and the Sacrifice he offered on the Cross, was designed, and is effectual, upon our fulfilling the Conditions required, to save our Souls from everlasting Destruction, and to deliver us from the Wrath to come; but was not intended to free or exempt us from present Evils, and temporary Sufferings, even tho' these are some Part of the

Wages

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Wages and Consequences of Sin. But notwithstanding this, we must still observe, that *Christ's* Sacrifice does *effectually* take away the Guilt of Sin in *this* Life as well as in the other, tho' not *fully* and *finally*; as 'tis the Cause and Means of reconciling God to us, and rendering him gracious and propitious to Sinners; and as Faith in this Sacrifice, or a lively Application of it to ourselves, especially in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, does plainly and powerfully tend to quiet and pacify the Conscience, to give us an assured Hope of Pardon, to dispel Fears and Misgivings, and to create in us, by Degrees, that *Peace of God which passeth all Understanding*. And tho' this Sacrifice was not design'd to deliver us from the Evils and Punishments of this Life, yet it takes out the *Sting* of them; and as they are render'd more supportable by the Example of a crucified Saviour, so are they likewise sanctified to us by the Merits of his Sufferings. For all the Afflictions of true Believers are consecrated by the Cross, and derive a healing and salutary Virtue from thence. So that by this Means being delivered from the tormenting Fears of future Punishment, and freed in a great Measure from any uneasy Apprehensions

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prehenſions of preſent Danger or approaching Calamities, and even of Death itſelf, and powerfully ſuſtained under the Weight and Preſſure of thoſe Evils they may at preſent feel and experience, they have nothing to do but to go on patiently and contentedly in their Duty, and to ſerve God with a willing Mind, *in Holineſs and Righteouſneſs before him all the Days of their Life.* Such is the bleſſed Fruit and Effect of *Chriſt's* giving himſelf for us, with regard to *this* Life, or our *preſent* Deliverance from the *Guilt* of Sin. But how great his Mercy is, and how mighty the Benefit, with reſpect to the other World, is what we can neither expreſs, nor conceive, till we come ourſelves to feel and partake of it. But,

Secondly, Chriſt gave himſelf for us, that he might redeem us not only from the *Guilt* and *Puniſhment*, but from the *Power* and *Dominion* of Sin. As in the former Caſe he had regard to the *longeſt Duration* of our Beings, and by an amazing Act of Love and Condeſcenſion, reſcued and delivered us from an Eternity of Woe and Miſery; ſo in this he conſults the Interests of our *better Part*, and by the ſanctifying and kindly Influences of the Holy

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Holy Spirit, which he purchased for us by his precious Blood, he renews, strengthens, and purifies the inner Man, purges the Soul from the Pollution and destroys the domineering Power of Sin. For, as *St. John* asserts, *the Blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all Sin.* It has a purifying Virtue and healing Quality, which are convey'd to the Soul by Means of a lively Faith, and those holy Ordinances that are appointed for this End. It was our Saviour's Sacrifice of himself that first render'd us capable of Mercy and Forgiveness, and put us into a State or Capacity of Salvation. Without this, we should neither have been able to *obtain*, nor been disposed to *sue* for Mercy. But now God commands and invites all Men to repent, by declaring his Acceptance of the Sacrifice of *Christ*, as a sufficient Atonement for Sins that are past; and upon their Repentance, the same Sacrifice is applied to their Benefit, and thro' Faith becomes effectual to the obtaining of their Pardon. Accordingly our Church directs us, in her most solemn Office, to beseech God, that *by the Merits and Death of his Son Jesus Christ, and through Faith in his Blood, we and all his whole Church may obtain Remission of our Sins, and all other Benefits*

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Benefits of his Passion. The first Benefit we receive by Christ's Death, is the Privilege of *Repentance*; and the next is *Remission of Sins*. But this Remission or Forgiveness of Sins, during this Life, being only a present Discharge from Punishment, which may be forfeited or lost by Relapses into Sin, something farther is necessary both to purify and fortify our Souls, to encourage and secure our Perseverance, and prepare us for the heavenly State. And therefore, after Pardon obtained for past Transgressions, there will be Occasion, so long as we are in this World, of making continual Application to the Virtue and Merits of *Christ's* Blood, to confirm our standing, and to keep us from falling, that we lose not those Things we have wrought, or grow weary in Well-doing. As our Blessed Saviour *gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all Iniquity; so he ever liveth to make Intercession* for all the Faithful; by Virtue of which, they are enabled from Time to Time, and in some good Measure, to maintain their Integrity, and to bring forth Fruits meet for Repentance, to arrive at length to something of Stability in Goodness, and to be continually drawing nearer and nearer to a State of Perfection.

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fection. Thus it is, that our Blessed Lord gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all Iniquity; that is, that he might gradually weaken, and at last destroy the whole Body of Sin, and from the Death of Sin raise us to a Life of Righteousness, and perfect his Strength in our Weakness. After all our own best Endeavours, both our Goodness and our Repentance will be imperfect. But then we may assure ourselves, that the Merits of *Christ's* Death will cover and atone for the one, and the Perfection of his Obedience supply the Defects of the other. From hence then we may perceive, that we stand in need of the Virtue and Efficacy of *Christ's* Blood through every Stage of our Christian Course, from our first entering into Covenant with him by Baptism, to the last Period of our Life: And consequently to have an Interest in his Merits, is our greatest Comfort, and our only Safety: This is what we are continually to seek to him for by Prayer, what is promised to us upon our Repentance, what we are to apply to ourselves by Faith, and what we are made Partakers of in the right Use of the Holy Sacraments. And happy are those Souls, that are built upon this Rock, that after all they have

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or can do, renounce all Merit and Righteousness in themselves, and rely wholly and entirely upon the Sacrifice and Righteousness of *Christ*, for Pardon and Grace, for Acceptance and Salvation. For, as the Apostle asserts, *by one Offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified, and obtained eternal Redemption for them.* Which Words import, that the Beginning, the Progress, and the finishing our Course here, and our final Consummation in Bliss hereafter, are plainly owing and thankfully to be ascribed to *Christ's* one Oblation of himself upon the Cross; which was sufficient to sanctify Sinners, to *perfect them that are sanctified*, and to *obtain eternal Redemption* for them.

Now this important Doctrine, thus briefly explained, will afford abundant Matter both of Humiliation and Comfort to us. 'Tis certainly a Matter of the greatest Humiliation, to consider that our Sins should require so costly a Sacrifice for their Expiation and Atonement; that nothing less than the Blood of the Son of God, which was of infinite Value, as being the Blood of one that is *God* as well as *Man*, could satisfy Divine Justice, deliver us from the Guilt and Dominion of Sin, redeem our
Souls

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Souls from Death, and save us from perishing everlastingly. By this we may see something of the malignant and destructive Nature of Sin, what it denotes, and what it deserves, how full of Turpitude and Baseness in itself, how odious and provoking to God, and how dreadfully fatal and pernicious to Man; when no other sufficient Atonement for it could be found, but the precious Blood of *Christ*, that Lamb of God, of spotless Innocence and infinite Dignity, and of more Worth than the whole World of Creatures. And what an humbling Thought should this be to every *Christian*, to consider, that the highest Price that was possible to be paid was exacted and demanded by God as a Ransom for *his* Soul in particular; and that nothing less could redeem him from all Iniquity, and save him from everlasting Destruction, but the lowest Debasement and most astonishing Sufferings of the Prince of Life and Lord of Glory? And as this is Matter of *Humiliation*, so is it likewise of *Consolation* to every faithful Christian: For, as *St. Paul* reasons the Case, *If, when we were Enemies, we were reconciled unto God by the Death of his Son, much more being reconciled,*

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we shall be saved by his Life. Christ died for us while we were his Enemies, and surely then he will not forsake us now we are become his Servants. He that gave himself for us on the Cross, does still speak to us in his Word, and offer himself for us in the Holy Sacrament: And if we receive him with Faith, and commemorate his Death and Passion with penitent and thankful Hearts, he will *redeem us from all Iniquity, and purify us to himself as a peculiar People*; which is the

Second general End of our Saviour's giving himself for us, and which I shall now briefly explain. 'Tis observable that in the Prayer he offered to his Father a little before his Passion, he did not pray for the unbelieving Part of the World, or those that should despise or reject his Gospel, but only for his Apostles, and for them that should believe on him through their Word. And *whom* he pray'd for on Earth, he now intercedes for in Heaven. He *died* for *All*, but he *intercedes* only for the *Faithful*. These are his chosen and *peculiar People*, whom he separates and distinguishes from the rest of the World. And, as the Psalmist observes, *Happy are the People that are in such a Case, yea, blessed are the People who have*
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the Lord for their God. For to be under the Care and Protection of the Lord *Jesus*, and to be acknowledged and treated by him as his *peculiar People*, his Servants, and Followers, is the greatest Honour and Happiness that can be enjoy'd in this Life, and the surest Pledge of everlasting Salvation. And it should be our constant Care and Endeavour to be found in the Number, tho' among the meanest, of these faithful Servants and *peculiar People*. But our Lord knew before he suffer'd, *who* would believe and obey him, and who would slight and neglect so great Salvation as should be tender'd to them. But then these last can have no Reason to complain, but must be left altogether without Excuse, inasmuch as *Christ* actually died for *them* as well as for those that shall be saved, and thereby put them into a Capacity of Salvation, and has often since invited them to accept of it, and to comply with his gracious Offer. That he actually died for *them* as well as for others, is plain from Scripture, which expressly affirms, that *Christ* died for all, and that he *tasted Death for every Man*. But those only will he own at last for his *peculiar People*, who are *redeemed from all Iniquity*, who

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join their own Endeavours to his merciful Undertaking, and refuse not to take some Pains to work out that Salvation, which he has so dearly purchased for them; who submit to his Government, obey his Laws, imitate his Example, and are willing to resign themselves to his Disposal. And those that do so, may assure themselves, whatever their State or Condition in this World be, that they are the *peculiar People* of the Lord. For these more particularly he was content to die. And tho' he gave himself for all, yet, no doubt, he more chearsfully laid down his Life for those, who he was sure would reap the Benefit of his Death and Passion. These are they which he calls his *little Flock* — *Fear not, little Flock, it is your Father's good Pleasure to give you the Kingdom.* These are they which he calls his *Sheep* — *My Sheep hear my Voice, and I know them, and they follow me. — And other Sheep I have which are not of this Fold, them also I must bring, and they shall hear my Voice, and there shall be one Fold, and one Shepherd.* These are they which he stiles his *Elect and Chosen* — *You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you; and ordained you that you should go, and bring forth Fruit,*
and

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and that your Fruit should remain. In a word, these are they which he esteems as his nearest Relations, as he said of his Disciples, when he pointed to them — *Behold my Mother and my Brethren*; and which he dignifies with the Title of *Friends*. — *Ye are my Friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.* The *Jews* were anciently the peculiar People of God, separated by him from all the Nations round about, as *Moses* declares — *Thou art a holy People to the Lord thy God. The Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special People unto himself, above all the People that are upon the Face of the Earth.* And the *Jews* all along exceedingly valued themselves on this Account: And how often does *Moses* remind them of their great Privilege in this respect? And how does he glory and triumph on this Occasion? *For what Nation, says he, is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what Nation is there so great, that hath Statutes and Judgments so righteous, as all this Law which I set before you this Day? — For ask now of the Days that are past, which were before thee, since the Day that God created Man upon*
P 3 *Earth,*

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Earth, and ask from the one Side of Heaven unto the other, whether there hath been any such Thing, as this great Thing is, or hath been heard like it? Did ever People hear the Voice of God speaking out of the midst of the Fire, as thou hast heard, and live? Or hath God assayed to go and take him a Nation from the midst of another Nation, by Temptations, by Signs, and by Wonders, and by War, and by a mighty Hand, and by a stretched-out Arm, and by great Terrors, according to all that the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your Eyes? Now if the Jews had Reason to boast on these and the like Accounts, how much greater Reason have Christians, who are now the peculiar People of God, to exult and triumph under the Sense and Experience of superior Advantages and higher Favours; who are redeemed from worse than Egyptian Bondage, from the Slavery of Sin and the Dominion of Satan, not by the Overthrow of Pharaoh and his Host, but by the Effusion of the Blood of the Son of God, by which he spoiled Principalities and Powers, and made a Skew of them openly, triumphing over them in his Cross; not by opening a Passage through the Red Sea, but by breaking through the

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the Bars of the Grave, and opening the Kingdom of Heaven to all Believers. This is the Christian's Triumph, which sets them as far above the *Jews* in Privilege and Dignity, as the Heaven is higher than the Earth. And therefore as *Moses* endeavoured to excite the Children of *Israel* to a due Observance of the Law, by often putting them in remembrance of their happy Case and Condition above all the Nations round about, so *St. Peter* reminds Christians of their higher Privileges and Obligation in this respect — *Ye are a chosen Generation, a royal Priesthood, an holy Nation, a peculiar People, that ye should shew forth the Praises of him who hath called you out of Darknes into his marvellous Light.* I shall therefore conclude this Head with *St. Paul's* earnest and pathetick Exhortation to the same purpose — *I therefore the Prisoner of the Lord, beseech you, that ye walk worthy of the Vocation wherewith ye are called: With all Lowliness and Meekness, with Long-suffering, forbearing one another in Love, endeavouring to keep the Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace.* And this brings me, in the

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Third place, to consider the last general End, mention'd in the Text, of our Saviour's giving himself for us, which is, that as he design'd thereby to *purify to himself a peculiar People*; so he intended likewise that these should distinguish and manifest themselves as such, by being *zealous of good Works*. For tho' good Works are not what we are to expect to be *justified by*, since this can be only by the Merits of *Christ's* active and passive Obedience; by Faith in which, the Trespases and Offences of sincere Christians are done away, their Persons accepted and accounted as righteous before God, and made capable of being glorified by him as such. Tho', I say, good Works are not thus the *Cause* of our Justification, or the Reason *why* we are justified; yet the *Necessity* of them, in order to reap the Benefits of what our Saviour has done and suffered for us, is plainly and fully asserted throughout the whole New Testament. To mention only one Passage out of many to this purpose, our Blessed Lord affirms — *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that doth the Will of my Father which is in Heaven.* By which he declares, that neither
Belief

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Belief in him, nor *Confession* of him, nor *Praying* to him, nor all these together are sufficient, without *Doing the Will of God*. Good Works therefore are indispensably necessary, and upon a double Account, both as an Evidence of our Faith, and as a Condition of Salvation. For, 1. As a Tree is known by its Fruit, so is a saving Faith by the good Works which it produceth. The natural and genuine Effect of a sound Faith is a regular Conversation and sincere Obedience. What our Saviour says of *Love*, may, in this Respect, be truly affirm'd of *Faith*—*He that hath my Commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that believeth in me.* And therefore, according as we are diligent or remiss in our Duty, so we ought to judge of the Strength or Weakness of our Faith. Nor ought we to desire others to think better of us, as to our Faith, than what they observe of us, in relation to our Practice, provided only that their Observations be founded upon real Facts, and don't proceed from Prejudice and Mistake. And as good Works are thus necessary, as an Evidence of our Faith; so, 2. are they likewise as a *Condition* of Salvation. By *good Works* here, we are, I think, chiefly
to

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to understand such as are perform'd for the sake of God, and our Neighbour; and therefore call'd Works of Piety and Charity. With respect to these, St. Paul tells us, that *we are God's Workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to good Works, which God hath before ordain'd that we should walk in them.* As we are the *Workmanship* of God, we were certainly made for the Master's Use, and not for our own. For nothing that is made, is made for itself. Men don't build a House or a Ship only for the Name of the Thing, or that they may be seen and gazed upon, but to be of Use and Service to the Owners. And can we suppose the great Architect of the World to have fram'd and form'd Man only for his own Pleasure and Pastime, and not for the Service and Honour of his Maker? But we are not only his *Workmanship*, and as such obliged to endeavour to answer the End of our Creation, but likewise *created in Christ Jesus to good Works*, that is, are bought with a Price, and redeemed by his Blood, and renewed in the Spirit of our Minds; and so are under fresh and greater Obligations, on account of this new Creation, and as his *peculiar People*, to be *zealous of good Works*:

That

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That is, these are now a Part of the New Covenant he hath establish'd with us, and made a necessary Means and Condition of Salvation. If then we consider ourselves as the *Workmanship* of God, and as redeemed by *Christ*; if we desire to prove and shew our Faith, and to qualify ourselves for Happiness and Glory, we must think it a Duty highly incumbent on us to be always usefully employ'd, and to be *zealous of good Works*; this being one of the best Testimonies we can give of our Sincerity, and one of the best Means we can use to promote and secure our Perseverance. There is no Fear of Mis-carrying, no Danger of Apostatizing, while we continue zealously affected towards God and Goodness. While we have Time therefore, let us be doing Good, and not be weary in well-doing. And for a farther Incentive to the Practice of this, and to enforce what has been said, I shall conclude with putting you in mind of the great Motive urged by the Apostle in the Verse before my Text:—*Looking for that blessed Hope, and the glorious Appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ.* 'Tis our Faith in Things to come, that must regulate our Conduct, and
influence

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influence our Practice. To regard only Things that are present, or to confine our Thoughts within the scanty Limits of this transitory Life, argues a Narrowness and Littleness of Soul. But Christians are to *walk by Faith, and not by Sight*, to enlarge their Prospect, and to carry their Views into Eternity; and there they will meet with Objects enough to awaken all the Powers of their Souls, and to rouse them from their sinful Lethargy. But among all the Objects of Futurity, there is none of greater Concern, or more affecting, than the second Coming and *glorious Appearing of the great God, even our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*. The serious and devout Consideration of this, must needs be attended with the kindest Influence, and the happiest Effects; and be a powerful Motive to excite our Diligence, to encourage our Perseverance, and to make us fruitful in every good Work. Were Christians but disposed to entertain their Minds sometimes with pious Reflections on their Lord's second Advent, and the many awful Circumstances that will attend it, and their own very near Concern in it; as this would be the readiest Way to prevent any Surprise from their own Unpreparedness, or the Suddenness

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denness of his Appearing; so by this means likewise they would be inclined by Degrees to wish and long for his Coming, and earnestly look for that *blessed Hope and glorious Appearing*. And to such as these only, we can with any Certainty affirm, that our Lord's second Coming will prove beneficial, or be Matter of Joy and Consolation: As *St. Paul* plainly intimates, when he tells us, that the Lord the righteous Judge will give the Crown of Righteousness to all them that *love his Appearing*. Did we seriously love and desire his Appearing, we should sit more loose to the Things of this World, endeavour to redeem our Time, and labour after those Virtues and Dispositions of Soul that are necessary to prepare us for meeting our Lord, and to recommend us to his Acceptance and Approbation, upon which no less than a whole Eternity of Happiness depends. Knowing therefore the Certainty of our Lord's Coming to Judgment, and the Uncertainty of the Time, let us take care to make due and timely Provision against that awful and important Season, *looking for and hastening to the Coming of the Day of God, and pressing towards the Mark for the Prize of the high Calling*

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Calling of God in Christ Jesus, in Faith and Patience, Humility and Meekness, Mortification and Self-denial, Charity and constant Perseverance unto the End. So shall an Entrance be minister'd unto abundantly into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

To whom with the FATHER, and the HOLY GHOST, three Persons, and one GOD, be ascribed, as is most due, all Honour and Glory, and Thanksgiving, now and for ever. Amen.

S E R-

S E R M O N II.

Obligations and Motives to aim at
Perfection, from the Consideration
of *Christ's* Death and Resurrection,
and of his being the great Shep-
herd of the Christian Fold.

H E B. XIII. 20, 21.

*Now the God of Peace, that brought
again from the Dead our Lord
Jesus, that great Shepherd of the
Sheep, through the Blood of the
everlasting Covenant, make you
perfect in every good Work to do
his Will, working in you that which
is well-pleasing in his Sight, through
Jesus Christ, to whom be Glory for
ever and ever. Amen.*

AS the great Article of *Christ's* Resur-
rection is built upon the clearest and
strongest Evidence, supported by the
concurrent Testimony of Men and Angels,
and

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and confirm'd by a long Series of miraculous and providential Events; so 'tis an Article of that Extent and Influence, that it really comprehends or implies all that Christians are obliged to believe and practise. Every Article in the Creed, relating to our Saviour, depends entirely upon the Belief of this, which is the Foundation of all the rest, and the main Prop and Support of all reveal'd Religion. And as every Duty and Precept of the Gospel derives its binding Force from the Divine Authority of the Law-giver; so this Authority is best proved, and most clearly demonstrated, by our Saviour's fulfilling his Promise of rising again the third Day. *For he was declared to be the Son of God with Power, by the Resurrection from the Dead.* St. Paul therefore, in writing to the *Hebrews* or *Jewish* Converts, and in wishing and endeavouring their Perfection, takes particular Notice of the Death and Resurrection of *Christ*, as of two of the principal Means and Motives of all Obedience — *Now the God of Peace, that brought again from the Dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the Sheep, through the Blood of the everlasting Covenant, make you*
perfect

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perfect in every good Work to do his Will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his Sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be Glory for ever and ever. Amen. The Words are so copious and comprehensive, that they can't well be consider'd, as is usual, under proper and distinct Heads of Discourse; and therefore I shall only explain them in the Order in which they lie, and raise such Doctrines and Deductions from them, as the several Particulars naturally suggest to us.

First, As God is the Author of Virtue and all Perfection, the Reconciler of Men to himself, and to one another, he is here mention'd by the Apostle under the Title of *the God of Peace*: By which he gently and tacitly reminds all Christians, that if they would have God to be *their* God, they must follow after *the Things that make for Peace*. And by wishing and praying that *the God of Peace* would perfect them in every good Work, he does not obscurely intimate, that a *peaceable* Temper is a necessary Introduction, and a great Step towards *Perfection*. We may observe, with respect to the Things of this World, that nothing generally more contributes to our

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Settlement and Security, than a quiet, gentle, and peaceable Disposition; and that ruffling and disorderly Passions seldom gain the End they aim at; that they are so far from promoting the Success of our temporal Affairs, that they rather set them farther back, create new Obstacles in the Way, and tend only to frustrate and disappoint our most reasonable Hopes, Expectations and Endeavours. Or however this may prove as to *Temporals*, the Observation is most certainly true in relation to our *spiritual* Concerns. For as Peace, Quietness, and Contentment, are sure Means of advancing us in Piety and Holiness; so the contrary Tempers, Anger, Resentment, and the like, do only serve to put the Soul into an unnatural Posture, into a State of Uneasiness, which must necessarily check its Operations, indispose it for the Discharge of Duty, and by Consequence hinder or retard its Progress in Virtue and Goodness. If then we aim at Perfection, if we desire to be made perfect in every good Work, to make any considerable Progress in Religion, or to come off victorious at last in our Christian Warfare, we must *seek Peace and ensue it,*
and

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and be sure to take to ourselves this Part of the Christian Armour, among others, to have *our Feet shod with the Preparations of the Gospel of Peace.*

But farther, 'tis *the God of Peace that brought again from the Dead our Lord Jesus.* And who could raise the Dead, but God alone? Who but *the God of Peace* should bring again from the Dead *the Prince of Peace?* Who but this *God of Peace* could put a Stop to that State of Enmity and Hostility that then subsisted between a Holy Creator and his sinful Creatures, by first accepting of an Atonement for their Sins, and then declaring his Acceptance of it, by restoring the Person that made it to Life again? Which is the fullest Demonstration that can well be imagined of God's Reconciliation and Goodwill towards Men. Had God been pleased to send an Angel or an Arch-angel from Heaven to publish and proclaim to the World, once or more, in every Age, that he was now fully satisfied for the Sins of Mankind, by the Sacrifice made by his only Son on the Cross, that he was now reconciled to Sinners, and would not exact of them the Punishment of

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their Sins, provided only they repented and
believed the Gospel. Had God, I say, taken
this or any other Method to signify his being
fully satisfied with the Sacrifice of the Death
of *Christ*, as an Expiation for the Sins of the
World; he could not have done it more ef-
fectually than he has now done by raising him
from the Dead; whereby he hath given Af-
surance unto all Men, that his Anger is paci-
fied, his Justice atoned, and the Curse of the
Law so far removed, that Death is abolish'd,
and we restored to a Capacity of Salvation.
For as the Death of *Christ* was attended with
all the Circumstances of Horror, with all the
Symptoms and Appearances of divine Wrath
and Indignation against Sin; so his Resurrecti-
on is the most infallible Token and Pledge of
his Favour and Reconciliation. For can it
be imagined, that God should exert his omni-
potent Power on this Occasion, if his Justice
had not been fully satisfied, and a Way there-
by opened for the full and free Exercise of his
Mercy? His not suffering therefore *his Holy*
One to see Corruption, is so sure and evident a
Mark of his being well-pleased with what our
Blessed Lord had undergone for our Sakes,

as

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as must give us everlasting Consolation and good Hope through Grace, and fill us with all Joy and Peace in Believing. For this is a Declaration to all the World, that the Indignation is overpast, that Pardon, Grace, and Favour are now to be obtained, and Mankind restored to the Privilege of a blessed Immortality. We have therefore now nothing to fear even from the Power and Justice of God, if we only take care to fulfil the Conditions required of us. For, as the Apostle justly argues, *if when we were Enemies we were reconciled unto God by the Death of his Son, much more being reconciled, we shall be saved by his Life.* Which brings me to consider,

The Person thus raised from the Dead, as represented in the next Words, under the Character of *the great Shepherd of the Sheep* — *Now the God of Peace which brought again from the Dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the Sheep.* In which last Words the Apostle magnifies the Goodness and Mercy of God towards us in the Resurrection of *Christ*, from the Consideration of the superior Dignity and high Office of the Person that was raised. Our Saviour calls himself in the

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tenth of St. *John*, the good *Shepherd*; by the Prophet *Ezekiel* he is stiled by way of Eminence the *one Shepherd*; by St. *Peter*, the *chief Shepherd*; and here, by St. *Paul*, the great *Shepherd*: All which several Titles are design'd to distinguish him from all other Shepherds or Pastors whatsoever. He is the good *Shepherd* in the most eminent Manner, not only as taking the greatest and most tender Care of his Flock, but because he laid down his Life for the Sheep. As to the first, he is thus described by the Prophet *Isaiah* — *He shall feed his Flock like a Shepherd; he shall gather the Lambs with his Arms, and carry them in his Bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.* And as to the other, he expressly says of himself, *I am the good Shepherd; the good Shepherd giveth his Life for the Sheep.* He is likewise the *one Shepherd*, as he is the *one Saviour*, the *one Mediator*, in a peculiar Sense exclusive of all others: For no other Shepherds can feed *their* Flocks, as he does *his*, with the Word of Truth and the Bread of Life, or give them their own Flesh to eat. He is also the *chief* or principal Shepherd, not only as he is set over the several Flocks of Christians, whether
they

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they were originally *Jews* or *Gentiles*, or however divided or dispersed, which are all but *one Fold under one Shepherd*; but likewise as he inspects and superintends the *Shepherds themselves*, of what Rank or Station soever they be, who are all accountable to him for their Care or Neglect of their respective Charges. *Lastly*, He is the *great Shepherd*, as he is *God* as well as *Man*, able to protect, and mighty to save; as great in Power as he is in Compassion, and as compassionate as he is powerful: For, *as his Majesty is, so is his Mercy*; having all the Mercy of *God*, and all the Tenderness of *Man*, being *touched with a feeling of our Infirmities*, and at the same Time *able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him*. He is likewise the *great Shepherd*, as he is follow'd, obey'd, and glorified by all sincere Believers throughout the whole World. For *my Sheep bear my Voice*, says *Christ* himself, *and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal Life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my Hand*. He alone is their Strength and Courage, Wisdom and Protection, a Refuge from the Storm, a Shadow from the Heat, a Help and Succour in Time of Need, and the Defender of all

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them that put their Trust in him. This is the *great Shepherd of the Sheep*, whom God raised from the Dead, not for his Sake alone, but for the Sake of the Sheep, that must otherwise have been lost and perished. We find his little Flock were in Danger of being so, during the short Time of his Passion and three Days Absence from them in the Grave. The Day before his Crucifixion he told them—*All ye shall be offended because of me this Night. For it is written, I will smite the Shepherd, and the Sheep of the Flock shall be scattered abroad. But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee.* While he was with them, he kept them safe, and none of them was lost, but the Son of Perdition. But no sooner did he enter upon his bitter Passion; no sooner was the Shepherd smitten, but, as it was foretold, they were scattered every Man to his own, and left him alone. They all forsook him and fled. And after they had heard, that he was condemn'd to Death and crucified, it is not to be imagin'd, what Terror and Consternation they must have been under at having all their Hopes thus dashed and disappointed at once. But when this dark Cloud of Horror and Affrightment was dispersed

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dispersed by the Rising of the Sun of Righteousness, and he had confirm'd to them the Truth of his Resurrection by many infallible Proofs, they were then all Life and Vigour, above the Fear of Danger and of Death itself; and after they were endued with Power from on High, they chearfully set about their great Work, and went on successfully in the Propagation of the Gospel, and triumphed over all Opposition. And as it was the *God of Peace that brought again from the Dead our Lord Jesus*; as it was the *great Shepherd of the Sheep* that was thus brought again from the Dead; so the following Words,

Through the Blood of the everlasting Covenant, may point out to us the *meritorious Cause* of his Resurrection. There are two Reasons indeed to be given, why it was not possible that *Christ* should be holden of Death, the one *natural*, the other *moral*. The natural Reason is the inseparable Union of the Godhead with the Manhood in the Person of *Christ*; which Union could not be dissolved by Death. For tho' all Support from the Divine Nature was suspended, and the Human suffered to sink for awhile, by a real Separation of the Soul from the Body, yet the Divinity,

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vinity, which was still united with both the human Parts, tho' then divided from each other, must necessarily preserve the one from Corruption, and would not suffer the other to remain in a State of Separation for any longer Time than had been pre-ordained by the determinate Counsel of God the Father. Which Time being expired, by the mutual Concurrence and Co-operation of all the Three Divine Persons, the Soul of *Christ* returned into his Body, and he that was dead and buried was restored to Life again. This *natural* Reason why *Christ* could not in his Body see Corruption, is assign'd by St. *Peter* in those Words — *Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the Pains of Death, because it was not possible he should be holden of it.* And this Impossibility will farther appear from the *moral* Reason implied in those Words now under Consideration — *Through the Blood of the everlasting Covenant:* Which must relate either to the New Covenant established between God and Men, and ratified in the Blood of *Christ*; and therefore called *everlasting*, because it is of perpetual Duration, or not to be succeeded by any other; or else to a previous Covenant or Compact between God the Father

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ther and God the Son, *from everlasting*, or before Time was. For 'tis certain, that every Thing relating to the great Work and Mystery of our Redemption, was transacted in the Council of Heaven, and fix'd and determin'd before the Son of God became incarnate, and even before Man was created. And among other Things it seems particularly to have been agreed between the sacred Persons of the Blessed Trinity, as it was afterwards typified in the Old Testament, that the *Messiah*, who was to be cut off from the Land of the Living, should continue in the State of Death three Days, and be raised again the third Day. So that here was a *moral Necessity* for our Saviour's Resurrection, that so the Scriptures might be fulfilled, and the Agreement between him and his Father might be performed. This our Saviour plainly enough signified in these Words:

—No Man taketh away my Life, but I lay it down of myself; I have Power to lay it down, and I have Power to take it again. This Commandment have I received of my Father. That is, 'tis the Commandment, Will, and Pleasure of my Father, that I should both lay down my Life and take it again. And the Equity, Reasonableness, and Justice of
this

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this will still more evidently appear, if we consider it with respect to the Covenant between God and Men. For as *Christ* suffer'd Death in order to pay a Ransom for Mankind, and to make Satisfaction to Divine Justice for their Sins; so when this Ransom was paid, and this Satisfaction made, there was no farther Necessity for *Christ's* continuing any longer under the Power of Death; but rather on the other side, a strong and urgent Necessity for his rising again, that so it might plainly appear to the World, that God was reconciled to Sinners, and had accepted of the Atonement made for their Sins. And therefore for any Thing that we can see to the contrary (with respect to the *Equity* of the Case) our Saviour might have been revived *immediately* after he was crucified. The same Power that raised him the third Day, could have raised him the first Day, or as soon as he was taken down from the Cross. But what the Power of God could do in this Case, his Wisdom saw fit not to do: And tho' the Reasons of this Dispensation are not revealed or made known to us; yet one Reason was plainly this, *namely*, to take off all Suspicion of the Truth and Reality of his Death; which is the very Reason why *Christ* himself,

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himself, when he was about to raise *Lazarus* out of the Grave, *abode two Days still in the same Place where he was*, after he heard of his Sickness and knew he was dead; that so his Death might be not only publicly known, but certain and unquestionable. And then was the Time for him to display his Divine Power in raising him from the Dead. And this was the Case of his own Resurrection. He might have come down alive from the Cross, or been raised to Life immediately after; but it was necessary, or expedient at least, that he should continue some little Time in the State of Death, that so his Death might be the more credited, and his Resurrection the more evident and undeniable. Thus we see, both upon a *natural* and *moral* Account, that it was not *possible* that *Christ* should be holden of Death. His *divine* Nature would not suffer the *human* to see Corruption; and even the Justice of God which had been satisfied for our Sins by his Death, was now obliged to release him from the Power of Death. By the Blood of his Cross our Saviour ratified the *everlasting Covenant* on his Part; by Virtue of this everlasting Covenant he was to be raised again; and, by Virtue of this Resurrection, he has over-

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overcome Death, and opened unto us the Gate
of everlasting Life.

I come now to speak to the remaining Part
of the Text, which relates wholly to Practice.
'Tis the Apostle's Wish and Prayer for the
Christians he writes to, that the *God of Peace*
would make them perfect in every good Work to
do his Will, working in them that which is
well-pleasing in his Sight, concluding with
this Doxology to the second Person in the
Ever-blessed Trinity, *To whom be Glory for*
ever and ever, Amen. In speaking therefore
to this Part of the Text, I shall (1.) briefly
state the true Notion of Perfection in general;
and (2.) consider the Particulars of which
this Perfection does consist, more especially
with regard to the Doctrines before explain'd.

First, I shall briefly state the Notion of
Perfection in general. When Men hear of
Perfection, and are exhorted to be perfect, or
to labour after Perfection, they presently ima-
gine that something so very extraordinary
is required of them, something so far above
the Reach of their Capacities ever to attain,
that they are ready to conclude themselves to
be little or no way concerned in Discourses of
this Nature. They have no other Notion of
Christian

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Christian Perfection, than that 'tis either some miraculous Degree of Faith, that is able, as it were, to remove Mountains, or some uncommon Heights of Piety, Devotion, or Contemplation, or some extraordinary Gift of Charity, that obliges and will dispose a Man to sell all that he has and give to the Poor. These or the like Notions Men generally entertain of *Christian Perfection*. But to undeceive us in this respect, and to rectify such Errors and Mistakes, St. Paul here prays for the *Jewish* Converts, that God would *perfect them in every good Work*; that is, that he would make them perfect in the Performance of plain and common Duties. He does not pray, that they may be able to understand all Mysteries and all Knowledge; that they may have the Gift of Utterance and the Spirit of Supplication; that they may be able to preach, or to pray *extempore*; that they may divest themselves of all human Passion and Affection, receive Adversity without any Sorrow or Concern, or Prosperity without any Feelings of Joy or Comfort. No; these are not the *Marks* of Christian Perfection, which does not, in strictness, require any Thing unreasonable or unnatural. Sometimes indeed God is pleased
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to call Men to a State of Perfection by unusual Tests of their Faith and Obedience. And in all such Cases, if Men would be perfect, they must readily comply with the divine Call or Command, be the Instances of Obedience required of them never so difficult or disagreeable. But these are extraordinary and uncommon Cases. *In general*, Men may arrive, by Degrees, to such a State of Perfection as is attainable in this Life, by the Practice of common and ordinary Duties. For Perfection consists in doing our Duty, whatever that be, in a perfect Manner, or with Exactness, Regularity, and Constancy, in doing the Will of God from the Heart, whenever or however made known to us. The having Respect to God in all we do, or a due Regard to his Will and Pleasure, is the proper Test and Measure of all Perfection. For as *Samuel* told *Saul*, *Behold, to obey is better than Sacrifice, and to hearken than the Fat of Rams*. This is the Perfection that was required of the *Jews*; but *Christian Perfection* must be founded on *Christian Principles*, and have respect more particularly to the Author and Finisher of our Faith, and the
great

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great Shepherd of the Sheep. And this brings me, in the

Second Place, to consider the Particulars of which this Perfection does consist; more especially in Reference to the Doctrines before explain'd. *St. Paul* here prays for the *Hebrews*; that God would *perfect them in every good Work*; which in another Place he expresses thus, that they may *stand perfect and compleat in all the Will of God*: Which two Passages together take in the whole Compass of Duty and Virtue, and include the *Whole* of Perfection. *Every good Work*, and *all the Will of God*, must comprehend all the several *Kinds* of Christian Morality; and to be *perfect* and *compleat* in these, implies those high *Degrees* of Proficiency in Goodness we ought to aim at, by pressing still forward *towards the Prize of our high Calling of God in Christ Jesus*. But in so large a Compass of Duty, 'tis not to be expected, that, in a single Discourse, and towards the Close of it, I should speak particularly to every Branch of it. It may be sufficient in this Case, to point out some of the most eminent Virtues, and weightier Matters of the Gospel, which the Death and Resurrection of *Christ*, and the Considera-

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tion of his being the *great Shepherd of the Sheep*, do more especially oblige us to. The *Death of Christ*, in its full View and Extent, was not only designed to be an Expiation for Sin, but likewise to be an Example, a Pattern, an Instruction to us, of Humility, Mortification, and perfect Submission to the afflicting Hand of God. Our Blessed Saviour, by humbling himself, and becoming obedient unto Death, even the Death of the Cross, has most powerfully recommended and enforced the Practice of Humility. As *Pride* was not made for Man, so *Humility* was not made for the Son of God; yet he humbled himself far beyond what any mere Man ever did, or can do. *He* humbled himself, who knew no Sin, which is the justest Cause of Humiliation: And shall sinful Dust and Ashes be proud? *The Disciple is not above his Master, nor the Servant above his Lord.* And the great Lesson which he all along taught his Disciples, is this — *Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in Heart.* And this Lesson he fully explain'd and exemplified in his last Sufferings, by which he is said to be *made perfect*; and without learning this great Lesson, or imitating the Lowliness and Humility
of

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of our Blessed Master, we can never hope to arrive at a State of Perfection. But his Death and Passion do not only read us a Lesson of Humility, but likewise of Penance and Mortification. He died unto Sin *once*, to teach us to die unto Sin *always*; *knowing this*, saith the Apostle, *that our old Man is crucified with him, that the Body of Sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve Sin: For he that is dead, is freed from Sin.* The Meaning of which Words is, that as *Christ* died to make Expiation for our Sins, so he died likewise by way of Example, to shew us, that if we would have an Interest in the Merits of his Death, we must ourselves *mortify the Deeds of the Body*, and *crucify the Flesh, with the Affections and Lusts*. Every Man carries about with him a Body of Sin, which must be destroyed, before he can practise Holiness, or hope for Happiness. Without the Destruction of this Body of Sin, we can no more be *actually* sanctified and saved, than without the Death of *Christ* we could have been made *capable* of Pardon and Salvation. 'Tis in vain therefore to aim at, or think of Perfection, before we heartily set about this necessary Work of Mortification,

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which is at least one Half of Religion; or like preparing the Ground for sowing the Corn. And we may as reasonably expect a good Crop by sowing among Briars and Thorns, as to hope for the Fruits of Righteousness, Virtue, and Goodness to spring up and increase among us, while our Hearts are full of Corruption, our Passions inordinate, and our Affections for Sin strong and unmortified. We should then be persuaded, in Time, and in good Earnest, to set about this most necessary Work, and to lay the Axe to the Root of the Tree, lest afterwards any Root of Bitterness springing up trouble us, and choak our Endeavours after Perfection, and hinder our farther Progress in Piety and Goodness. But this is not all that the Death of *Christ* instructs us in, or obliges us to. His exemplary and unparallel'd *Patience* under all his mighty Sufferings, is a most forcible Engagement to be of the same Mind and Temper with him. The Apostle St. *James* exhorts us to *let Patience have her perfect Work, that we may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing*; by which he most plainly intimates, that *Patience* is the readiest Way, and one of the principal Means to arrive at a State of Perfection. And if the
Captain

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Captain of our Salvation, as *St. Paul* assures us, *was made perfect through Sufferings*, it is not to be expected, that we can be made perfect, without undergoing something of the like Sufferings; without drinking, in some Measure, of the bitter Cup, which he so deeply drank of. And this we should certainly be ashamed to refuse or decline, if we did but duly reflect on the infinite Distance that is between him and us, on *his* Innocence and *our* Sinfulness, on *his* Dignity, and *our own* Unworthiness. For what are the very Best of the Sons of Men in Comparison of him? What are all their Sufferings and Sorrows, the very Worst of them, when compared to his? *Was there ever Sorrow like unto his Sorrow?* And yet was there ever any Innocence like unto his Innocence, or any Patience like unto his Patience? In the Death of *Christ* there was a Complication of almost all the Miseries that are incident to Mankind in this Life. The Apostle tells us expressly, that *he was in all Points tempted like as we are, yet without Sin*. And if in all Points he was tempted, we may be sure, that there has no Temptation taken us, no Affliction can befall us, but we may find in the Sufferings of *Christ* something answer-

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ing to it, and far exceeding it. No single
Person ever did, or ever can suffer the like
here, as he did. His Sufferings surpass ours
both in Number, Weight, and Measure. He
was all his Life long a Man of Sorrows and
acquainted with Grief: And his Death was
such a Multiplication of Woes and Sorrows,
as is not to be parallel'd in all History. Then
as to the Weight and Measure of them, this
was so prodigiously great, as must have crush'd
any merely created Being. The *Iniquities of*
us all were laid on his Shoulders, and this
heavy Weight pressed down upon him by the
just Anger of an incensed God. And yet how
calm, how silent, how resign'd was he under
all this Load of Vengeance, inflicted upon
him only for our Sins! Now what a most
powerful and almost irresistible Motive to Pa-
tience and Meekness is here, if we did but se-
riously consider, and frequently set this Pattern
before our Eyes? If ever then we desire to be
perfect, we must learn to be *patient*; and if
ever we hope to be patient, we must often
contemplate our crucified Saviour. And as a
Conformity to him in his *Death*, by Humili-
ty, Mortification, and Patience, will gradual-
ly lead us on to a State of Perfection; so

His

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His *Resurrection* likewise points out to us some resembling Excellencies or Qualifications, that will help to perfect us in every good Work. And one naturally flows from the other, as St. Paul intimates in these Words — *For if we have been planted together in the Likeness of his Death, we shall be also in the Likeness of his Resurrection.* To be planted in the Likeness of his *Death*, signifies what I have been proving, our destroying the Body of Sin by proper and repeated Acts of Repentance and Mortification, Humility and Patience; and by Consequence, to be planted in the Likeness of his *Resurrection*, must denote our Rising with him to Newness of Life, or the having new Hopes, new Affections, and new Desires, which will necessarily produce new Actions and a new Conversation. For Hope, Love, and Desire are the main Springs of all human Actions, which, if duly regulated and rightly fixed upon spiritual and heavenly Objects, will carry us on successfully, from one Degree of Virtue and Goodness to another, *till we come to a perfect Man, to the Measure of the Stature of the Fulness of Christ.* Now this is the Inference and Improvement which the Apostle makes from the

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Doctrine of *Christ's* Resurrection. — *If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things that are above, where Christ sitteth at the Right-hand of God. Set your Affections on things above, and not on Things on the Earth.* 'Tis in vain to believe and commemorate *Christ's* Resurrection, unless we become conformable to it, by walking in Newness of Life, and having a greater Regard, than we had before, to spiritual and heavenly Things. But if we do so, we shall then despise both the Vanities and Vexations of this transitory Life, and arrive at last and by Degrees to a State of Perfection, Happiness, and Glory.

Lastly, That we may apprehend the full Scope and Force of the Apostle's Words, and see how well-chosen every Expression is, and how fit and proper each Branch of the Text is, to produce the Thing intended and prayed for, *namely, to perfect us in every good Work,* let us now, in few Words, consider the Office of *Christ* as *the great Shepherd of the Sheep,* and the mutual Relation that is between them. Now the Office of a Shepherd is to watch over his Flocks, to defend and protect them against ravening Wolves and other Beasts of Prey, to provide them good Pasture, to recover and bring home

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home those that have straggled and gone astray, and to bind up and heal those that are maim'd, or otherwise hurt and diseased. And 'tis easy to observe, how exactly all this, in the spiritual Sense, agrees with the Character and Office of our Blessed Redeemer, who is continually present with his Church, and inspects and watches over every particular Member of it. *His Eyes are in every Place, beholding the Evil and the Good;* and his Care and Concern for us is as great, as his Vigilance and Inspection over us. Which is more particularly seen in guarding and preserving his Flock against the Wiles and Assaults of the Tempter, from the Poison of false Doctrine, and the fatal Errors and Delusions of insidious Hereticks and subtle Innovators in the Faith. On the other hand, as he knows his own Sheep, and is known of them; so he has provided an abundant Supply for all the Needs and Necessities of their Souls, feeding them often with the Bread of Heaven, and giving to all their Portion of Meat in due Season; suiting his Word and Doctrine to every Man's Genius and Capacity, and dealing out the various Gifts of his Spirit, in such Kinds and Proportions, as he sees most useful and
conve-

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convenient. Moreover, this great Shepherd of the Sheep, as he came at first to seek and to save that which was lost; so he continues the same Care, and uses still the same Application, to recover those into the Paths of Holiness, who have been wandering in the Ways of Vice and Wickedness. And for those of his Flock, who at any Time have been wounded or damaged by the great Enemy of Souls, he has proper Remedies in Store, to heal and restore them to their pristine State: All which particular Branches of the Shepherd's Office do manifestly tend to work in us that which is well-pleasing in God's Sight; provided only that we be careful to hear and obey his Voice, to submit to his Disposals and to attend his Calls. This is the Character which *Christ* gives of his own Sheep — *My Sheep hear my Voice, and they follow me.* Now the Voice of this great Shepherd is the Holy Scriptures. *There* he speaks and calls to us; and if we be diligent to hear, to read, and to meditate upon them, we then attend to the Voice of the Shepherd: But if we neglect to read them ourselves, or to hear them expounded by others, *Christ* will not own us for his Sheep, nor regard us any otherwise, than

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than as *Heathens* and Strangers to his Fold.
Nor can we ourselves, without studying and
consulting these lively Oracles, either practise
or understand our Duty, either believe or re-
pent as we ought, and much less be made *per-*
fect in every good Work. The least Com-
mendation that can be given of the Holy
Scriptures is, that in them we may find more
useful Instruction, more solid Comfort, and
more lasting Satisfaction, than in all other
Writings and Discourses whatsoever. But St.
Paul goes a great deal farther, and therefore I
shall conclude with his Character of them, as
most suitable to the present Subject — *All*
Scripture is given by Inspiration of God, and
is profitable for Doctrine, for Reproof, for
Correction, for Instruction in Righteousness,
that the Man of God may be perfect, throug-
hly furnished unto all good Works.

Now to God the FATHER, God the SON,
and God the HOLY GHOST, be ascribed,
as is most due, all Honour, Glory, Do-
minion, and Power, for ever and ever.
Amen.

S E R M O N III.

The Insufficiency of mere Reason in Matters of Religion, and the peculiar Advantages of *Christ's* Doctrine, briefly consider'd, by way of Preservative against the Defection of the Times.

JOHN vi. 66, 67, 68.

From that time many of his Disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Then said Jesus unto the Twelve, will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answer'd him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the Words of eternal Life.

THE Doctrine which our Saviour teaches, and very much presses in the latter Part of this Chapter, is concerning the spiritual Eating his Flesh and drinking

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drinking his Blood ; which the *Jews* understanding in the gross literal Sense, express'd their Surprise at what they thought so unnatural, absurd, and impossible, by asking the Question, *How can this Man give us his Flesh to eat ?* But notwithstanding their misapprehending him, our Lord still insists on the great Importance of what he had deliver'd, explaining himself at the same time in such a manner, that those who were spiritually-minded might readily apprehend his Meaning. But as *the Spirit was not then given*, at least not in any great measure, *because that Jesus was not yet glorified* ; therefore we find, that even some of the Disciples themselves were so slow of Understanding, so backward of Belief, and so startled and disgusted at this new Doctrine, that they withdrew from him, and refused to hear him any more—*From that time many of his Disciples went back, and walked no more with him.* From this Instance we may observe how soon Men are offended, and prevail'd upon by Passion and Prejudice to forsake their own Mercy ; and how few those are that will stand by their Saviour in trying Times. For you see he makes it a Question, whether those he had
called

called and chosen out of the World, to be his constant Attendants, and the Witnesses of his Actions and Sufferings, would not at this Juncture be seduced by popular Error, and carried away in the Torrent of a general Defection.—*Then said Jesus unto the Twelve, will ye also go away?* But one more forward and zealous than the rest, and who is therefore commonly stiled the Mouth of the Apostles, makes Answer for them and himself—*Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the Words of eternal Life.* Tho' this Answer of *Simon Peter* was given all of a sudden, and without any the least Deliberation that we can perceive by the Context, yet 'tis such an Answer, as plainly appears to be the Result of the most mature Consideration, the most settled Perswasion, and the most tender and affectionate Regard to the Person and Doctrine of his Blessed Master, who began now to be deserted, not only by the Multitude, but by his own Disciples; and therefore to prevent the like Desertion in his Apostles, he seasonably asks them this Question, *Will ye also go away?* To which *St. Peter*, without Fear or Hesitation, readily replies, *Lord, to whom shall we go?* Shall we return to our old Masters,
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the *Jewish Rabbins*? or shall we seek for new Masters among the *Gentile Philosophers*? Behold, we have forsaken all to follow thee, and shall we now forsake thee to follow the World? We have seen thy Miracles, heard thy Divine Discourses, been favour'd with the saving Knowledge of thy Truth, with extraordinary Revelations of thy Person and Kingdom, and made to understand the sublime Mysteries of the Gospel; and shall we now think of bettering and improving ourselves, by relinquishing thee at last, and returning to the beggarly Elements of *Judaism*, or flying to the weak uncertain Guessees of human Wisdom, or vain Philosophy? *Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the Words of eternal Life.* Thou art the Fountain of all Light, the Source of all Bliss, the Sum of all Good, the Teacher of Truth, the Revealer of Secrets, the Author and the Object of our Happiness. *Thou hast the Words of eternal Life.* This is the plain Sense and Import of St. Peter's Answer, which points out to us, where Truth and Happiness *are* to be found, and where they *are not*. The latter is implied in this Question, *Lord, to whom shall we go?* And the former in this pious Acknow-

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Acknowledgment—*Thou hast the Words of eternal Life.* But to take in likewise what goes before, and what has been partly explain'd already, I propose from the Words of my Text to consider these four Particulars :

First, That spiritual Things and supernatural Truths are generally misunderstood, or but coldly received by mere natural Men, and often apt to give Offence to weaker Christians. *From that time many of his Disciples went back, and walked no more with him.*

Secondly, That in a Time of general Defection, we should endeavour, by gentle and seasonable Admonitions, to secure the Steadfastness of those that may otherwise be in Danger of falling away—*Then said Jesus unto the Twelve, will ye also go away?*

Thirdly, That if we trust to Reason alone for our Guide in Matters of Religion, or seek for Rest to our Souls in any of the Things of this World, we shall be miserably deceived and disappointed—*Then Simon Peter answer'd him, Lord, to whom shall we go?*

Fourthly, That all necessary or saving Truth, and solid Happiness, are only to be found in what our Blessed Saviour has recommended

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to our Belief and Practice—*Thou hast the Words of eternal Life.* And,

First, I am to shew that spiritual Things and supernatural Truths are generally misunderstood, or but coldly received by mere natural Men, and often apt to give Offence to weaker Christians—*From that time many of his Disciples went back, and walked no more with him.* During Mens natural State, or under some lower Degrees of Illumination, there is such a Darknes over the Understanding, arising from unmortified Passions and Affections, as hinders them from seeing Things afar off, or from having a right Apprehension of the great and important Truths of the Gospel. In this State the Objects of Faith, which are distant and invisible, are not only vastly disproportionate, but very disagreeable to the Faculties of the Soul, and Men neither relish nor discern them as they should. For, as the Apostle affirms, *the natural Man receiveth not the Things of the Spirit of God; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discern'd.* 'Tis not the Strength of Reason, or the Depth of Learning, that searches and fathoms the deep Things of God. I speak here of Men only in their *natural*
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State, and during the Prevalency of depraved Habits and Inclinations, which render them incapable of a close Attention to, a right Discernment and serious Examination of the Things of the Spirit. And whenever they attempt any thing this Way, their Attempt is generally found to be either lame or delusive. Considering then the Weakness of some, and the Degeneracy of others, 'tis no wonder that the great Truths of Christianity meet with so very cold a Reception in this Age, that there are such Diversities of Opinions, even in obvious and common Things, and so much Occasion given for Controversy and Contention about some of the most essential and important Points of our Holy Religion. No wonder that there have been such frequent Attempts to reduce not only the plainer Doctrines, but all the mysterious Truths of the Gospel, to the Standard of human Reason. And this indeed is the real, open, and immediate Cause of all the Heresies that from Age to Age, and from Time to Time, have ever infested the Christian Church; tho' the more secret and remote Cause is Pride and Self-sufficiency; which is so great an Obstacle to a true Faith, as will not suffer a Man freely
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and heartily to submit to the Belief of what he knows to be above his Capacity or Comprehension : And therefore if he finds he can't rise high enough to have a clear and distinct Apprehension of *the Things which are not seen*, he'll endeavour to bring them down to the Measure and Standard of his own Reason. But setting aside Pride, moral Indispositions, and other Causes, we are sufficiently assured, both from Scripture and Experience, that Reason itself, in its best and purest State that we can suppose it in at present, when unassisted and unenlighten'd by Grace, is not able to discern or receive the Things of the Spirit, or spiritual and supernatural Truths. When our Blessed Saviour discoursed with *Nicodemus* concerning spiritual Regeneration, or the Necessity of a New Birth, in order to be capable of entering into the Kingdom of God, and endeavour'd by familiar Emblems and Allusions to rectify his gross Conceptions about this Matter, the learned *Rabbi* presently began to ask, *How can these Things be?* And was so puzzled and confounded about some of the plainest and most obvious Things in Nature and Religion, as provoked our Lord to give him this sharp Reprimand, *Art thou a Master*

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in Israel, and knowest not these Things? And then from the natural Incapacity he had discover'd of apprehending the first Rudiments of his Religion, he argued his utter Insufficiency to believe and understand more sublime and heavenly Mysteries.—*If I have told you earthly Things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, If I tell you of heavenly Things?* And as *Nicodemus* was thus dull of apprehending the Nature, Uses, and End of the Sacrament of Baptism; so the *Capernaïtes* in this Chapter shewed no less Slowness or Averseness to believe our Saviour's Discourse concerning the other Sacrament, or the spiritual and sacramental Feeding on his Body and Blood. Yea, *many of his Disciples*, after they had heard him discourse for some time on this Subject, *said, this is an hard Saying, who can hear it?* And tho' afterwards he told them expressly—*It is the Spirit that quickeneth, the Flesh profiteth nothing. The Words that I speak unto you, they are Spirit, and they are Life;* yet they were still so much offended at his Doctrine, that they presently forsook him, and returned to him no more; leaving the great Bishop of Souls, the Teacher of Truth, and the Author of
Salva-

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Salvation, out of a hasty Disgust at some Words, which at the same time they profess'd they did not apprehend. And surely it must needs be a great Folly for Men to reject a Doctrine of very near Concern to themselves, for no other or better Reason, than because for the present they don't understand it: Tho' 'tis still a greater, to reject or oppose what they know to be the Truth. There are several Doctrines or Precepts of the Gospel that ever have been, and ever will be as much *hard Sayings* to lukewarm Christians, as that aforemention'd was to the *Jews*. The Doctrine of the *Cross*, in particular, is thought so contrary to all the Maxims and Interests of this World, and to the great Law of Self-Preservation (that is, if we regard only this Life, or our present Being) that few, I fear, would be willing or content to suffer what their Saviour may require of them, or their own Sins most justly deserve. And yet without somewhat of this necessary Discipline of the Cross, it is to be fear'd, that very few would be qualified for the Enjoyment of the Heavenly State. And therefore our Saviour positively declares, that *whosoever does not bear his Cross, and come after him, cannot be*

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his Disciple. At the same time it must be acknowledg'd, that there is no Duty to which human Nature is more violently averse, and no Doctrine which is more likely to give Offence, than this of the Cross. *St. Peter* himself, who at this time so zealously espoused his Master's Cause, when so many others deserted him, is a sad Instance of human Frailty in this Respect, with regard both to our Saviour and to himself. *As to himself,* 'tis a Case well known how soon he was frighted out of his Duty and Fidelity, in the Palace of the High-Priest, and how under this Fright he was tempted to deny his Master, and to seal and confirm that Denial in a dreadful Manner; and all this out of a Fear of Suffering. But this was not the first Time that he had fail'd and falter'd in this Respect. For when *Jesus* only began to shew unto his Disciples, how and what he must suffer, *Peter* took him and began to rebuke him, saying, *Be it far from thee, Lord; This shall not be unto thee.* But he turned and said unto *Peter*, *Get thee behind me, Satan, Thou art an Offence unto me; for thou savourest not the Things that be of God, but those that be of Men.* 'Twas *St. Peter's* Tenderness

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derness indeed, and great Affection to his Lord and Master, that at this time made him presume to offer his good Wishes and Advice for a more favourable Issue, than what his Lord had foretold; but you see his Notions and Perswasions for Indulgence even to his Saviour, were ill-grounded and ill-timed, as tending then to defeat and frustrate his gracious Purpose for the Redemption of Mankind; and accordingly met with a sharp and severe Rebuke. And this brings me, in the

Second Place, to shew in few Words, that in perilous Days, or in a Time of general Defection, we should endeavour, by seasonable Admonition and Reproof, to secure the Stedfastness of those, who may otherwise be in Danger of falling away.—*Then said Jesus unto the Twelve, will ye also go away?* He left the rest to their Ignorance and Prejudice, and suffer'd them to be carried away with popular Error, without offering one Word more to stay or detain them: But his Concern for his Apostles was so great, that he could not forbear using a few Words, by way of Caution or Commendation, to prevent any thing of the like Defection in them: I say, *by way of Caution or Commendation;*

for the Words may be taken in either Sense. In the latter, they import thus much—*Will ye also go away?* No, I am perswaded you will not; I have tried and experienced your Fidelity hitherto; and am well assured, that *at this Juncture*, tho' all Men should forsake me, yet will not you; tho' indeed, in the Words following, he foretells the Apostacy of one of them. Or, if we suppose the Words to be spoken only by way of Caution or Trial, they may then be thus paraphras'd—*Will ye also go away?* You my Apostles, whom I have so peculiarly chosen, and so signally favour'd? You see me now deserted, not only by the Multitude, but by many of my Disciples, who ought to have known and behaved better. And will ye follow such Examples? Will ye follow the Blind and Ignorant, who are offended at what they don't understand; and therefore don't understand, because they refuse to be taught by me? The Words will bear both these Senses; tho' the last is what St. *Peter* took them in, as is plain from the Answer which he gave to them. But take them either way, they are a sufficient Intimation to us, how *we* ought to behave on any the like Occasion; that whenever we
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see and observe a great Falling away from the Faith, or a general Corruption of Manners; we should neither be surpris'd, nor spend our Time and Labour to no Purpose; but leave the Issue and Event to the over-ruling Providence of God, who alone can order the unruly Wills and Affections of sinful Men, and in his own good Time stop the Spreading and Progress of Iniquity. Our Business in the mean time is not only to take heed to ourselves, that we be not overborne by the Torrent of Infidelity, or carried down the Stream of fashionable and popular Vices; but likewise that we should endeavour to strengthen, comfort, and confirm those that *yet* stand their Ground, and hold fast their Integrity, lest for want of timely Caution, and some seasonable Instructions, and proper Admonitions, *they also* at last fall from their own Stedfastness, and be led away with the Error of the Wicked. To prevent which both in ourselves and others, several Means and Methods are to be used; as mutual Exhortation and Advice, a diligent studying of the Holy Scriptures, a strict Regard to the vital and essential Parts of Religion, and a constant and conscientious Attendance on the publick Worship. But the
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most powerful and most effectual Means, and that which comprehends, in a manner, all the rest, is frequent Communion, the best Preservative against Vice, and the greatest Help and Inducement to all Virtue and Godliness of Living. Without this, all other Means may prove too weak and insufficient; but this alone (if that might be) is enough to promote and secure our Perseverance, to establish, strengthen and settle us. Let us then look upon this, among all the Means of Grace, as the one Thing needful, as the most useful and the most necessary. Our Saviour plainly intimates so much, or he would not so very particularly have insisted upon it, as he does in this Chapter (notwithstanding the Offence he was sure to give thereby) or so positively have declared, that *except ye eat the Flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his Blood, ye have no Life in you.* * By which he signifies, that we can no more maintain the spiritual Life without frequent Communion, than we can support the ani-

* If these Words were not spoken of the *Eucharist*, they manifestly tend, in their direct and immediate Consequence, to render that Sacrament useless and superfluous. For to what End should *Christ* institute his Holy Supper, if Christians could eat his Flesh, and drink his Blood, as well without it?

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mal Life without daily Bread. Those therefore, who are careful in their Preparations, and constant in their Attendance on this holy Ordinance, wisely consult the Health and Vigour of their Souls, take the best Method to keep their Accounts clear between God and their own Consciences, to be provided against all Hazards, against any great Calamity or sudden Surprise, for the Hour of Death and for the Day of Judgment. If then we desire to be in a constant Readiness to meet our Lord; if we desire to be secure against the greatest of Evils, and to be capable of enjoying the greatest Good; if we would walk warily in these dangerous Days, and not be found unprepared at the Time of God's Visitation, let us often repair to the Holy Table, with grateful Hearts and pious Dispositions; that so, if our Blessed Saviour should (as there may be Occasion) put the same Question to us, as he did to his Apostles, *will ye also go away?* we may be ready to answer with St. Peter, *Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the Word of eternal Life.* I proceed now to the Consideration of the

Third Particular, which is, that if we trust to Reason alone for our Guide in Religion, or
seek

seek for Rest to our Souls in any of the Things of this World, we shall be miserably deceived and disappointed. *Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? q. d.* We know of no other Way to the Truth but what thou teachest, no other Way to Happiness but what thou proposest. And if we search and examine all other Ways, we shall find this to be strictly true. Reason alone, and mere Nature, are but blind Guides in the great Concerns of our Souls, and will sooner lead us into Error and Danger, than deliver us out of them. They may serve well enough in the Affairs of this Life, or in the common Duties of Morality; but when they exceed their Bounds, and presume to meddle with the deep Things of God, and to dictate in the great Points of Religion, their Weakness and Insufficiency do then manifestly appear. I speak of Reason by itself, as acting *alone*, without any supernatural Aid, or Assistance. But when 'tis join'd with *Grace*, or under the Direction and Influence of the Holy Spirit, 'tis of admirable Use and Service in all Points of Religion, relating both to Faith and Practice. 'Tis the *Candle of the Lord* set up within us, to search and enlighten all the
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the Parts of the Soul; to enable us to compare spiritual Things with spiritual; to distinguish between Good and Evil, between Reality and Appearance; to examine the great Truths of Religion, and all Pretensions to Revelation, and to separate the False from the True. But to make this plainer, it will be necessary to make a Distinction in this Case, and to consider *Reason* in a threefold Respect, or according to a threefold Gradation. The *first* is pure simple Reason join'd with a corrupt Nature, but without any Light of Revelation, or any other extraordinary Helps to guide and direct it; which is the Case of mere *Pagans*. The *second* is Reason enjoying all the outward Advantages of Revelation, but destitute of inward Grace, of Illumination and Sanctification; which is the Case of mere nominal Christians and modern Deists. The *third* is Reason purified from the grosser Corruptions of Nature, and assisted not only by a divine Revelation, but by a divine Grace; which is the Case only of sound and sincere Believers. Now the mixing and blending these distinct Ideas together, or mistaking one for the other, has been the Occasion of much Perplexity and Confusion, and given great Advan-

Advantages to the Enemies of Christianity. For thus the mere natural Man, or the modern Deist, may vainly imagine that upon the Stock of *Reason* he is fighting against *Revelation*; when he is only setting up one Part of Revelation against another: For all his boasted Reason in Matters of Religion is no other, for the main, than a Ray reflected upon him from the Use of the Sacred Writings, or his Conversation with Christians, or from the Principles of Education. Those revealed Truths, which took early Possession of his Soul, which he all along sucked in, as it were, with his native Air, which he was taught with the first Rudiments of Learning, and which no one living in a *Christian* Country can be supposed wholly ignorant of; *these* he mistakes for *innate Ideas*, or for the pure natural Conceptions of his own Mind, ascribing wholly to *Reason* what proceeds originally from *Revelation*. From hence however it necessarily follows, that the Deist can't oppose *all* Scripture; for then he would oppose his own Notions, and act against the clearest Convictions of his own Mind. No, he is only for paring away what is disagreeable to his Temper and Inclination, and is well

well enough content to leave the other standing. And his Quarrel against Christianity, whatever he may pretend, is not because 'tis *ill-grounded*, but because 'tis *settled* upon so firm and immoveable a Foundation, as all the Wit and Policy of Man is never able to shake or undermine. He would seem indeed to deny the divine Authority of the Holy Scriptures, and may make some vain Attempts that way; but at the same Time he knows he cannot disprove it. But *therefore* does he seem to deny their Authority, because if he once admitted of that, he knows he must submit to the Belief of many Articles of Faith, which carnal Reason can never relish or digest. Thus does he basely employ that Knowledge of divine Things which he has from Scripture, against Scripture itself, and by some lesser Lights borrowed from thence, endeavours to extinguish the greater. If these Men would know what *mere Reason* is without Revelation, and what it would lead them to in Matters of Religion, if left to itself, they must consult the History of ancient *Heathens* and modern *Pagans*, or of those primitive *Indians* and *Americans*, who knew nothing of the Old Testament, and never heard of *Christ* and his Gospel.

Gospel. And *there* they would soon see, what strange Work their Idol-reason has made in the World; how it has multiplied Deities like the Sand of the Sea, and *changed the Glory of the incorruptible God into an Image made like unto corruptible Man, and to Birds, and four-footed Beasts, and creeping Things*; how it has led Men to do Sacrifice even unto Devils, in Variety of Forms, and in the most barbarous and inhuman Manner: And, in a Word, that there is scarce any Thing so absurd and ridiculous, or so monstrous and abominable, but what *Reason, human Reason*, has made an Object or Ceremony of Worship. And had it been the Lot of our modern Deists, or even of Christians themselves, to have been born and lived among such Infidels, it may justly be presumed, that *these* would not have seen farther, or have acted better than *they* have done. Among all the great Sages of Antiquity in the *Gentile* World, there are perhaps but one or two Instances to be found, that escaped the universal Contagion of Idolatry; and these are supposed to have imbibed their Notions from the Writings of *Moses*, or to have been particularly favoured with some Rays of divine Illumination, that so they might be, in some Sense,

Sense, as Harbingers or Forerunners to prepare the Way for that great Light that was to *lighten the Gentiles*. Thus it has been in every Age, and in every Place, where the Light of Revelation has not shone forth. *Before* the Flood, all Flesh had corrupted their Ways before God, and were wholly given to idolatrous Practices, except *Noah* and his Family. And not very long *after* the Flood, the Case was still worse; when there was not a Man to be found, who was not an *Idolater*. So that *Abraham* himself, who afterwards obtained the honourable Title of *the Friend of God*, was first called out of his own Country, and from a State of Idolatry, and immediately instructed by God himself, that so he might become the *Father of the Faithful*, and that *all Nations* might be *blessed in him*. And from that Time the Light of Revelation has shone upon the World with a dimmer or brighter Lustre for above three thousand and six hundred Years. And shall we now at length quit this glorious Light, to follow the weak glimmering Light of natural Reason? Shall we shut our Eyes against the Sun at Noon-day, and chuse to walk in Darkness? Shall we seek for Clearness in the Midst of

Obscurity, or for Truth in the Labyrinths of Error and Uncertainty? *Lord*, if we leave thee, *to whom shall we go?* Thou *Light of the Gentiles and Glory of Israel*, how great must be the Blindness and Infatuation of those, who refusing to be guided by the radiant Beams of thy heavenly Doctrine, walk in Ways of their own devising, and neither discern, nor desire to know the Truth? Justifying and approving, by their Revolt, their *beaten* Forefathers, who long wander'd in By-paths of Ignorance and Idolatry, benighted and bewilder'd by the Light of their own Reason, which these now set up and magnify above that of Revelation.

But as there is nothing but Deception, in trusting to Reason alone, in Matters of Religion; so there is nothing but Disappointment, in seeking for Rest to our Souls in any of the Things of this World. When once we leave the strait Road that leads to the heavenly *Canaan*, which our Blessed Saviour hath chalked out to us, we are then condemn'd to wander in a barren Wilderness, deprived of true Comfort here, or Hopes of Happiness hereafter. All the most desirable Things of this Life, even supposing them to be attain'd and enjoy'd

joy'd with Innocence, are much too feeble and scanty to give Rest and true Contentment to an immortal Soul, which nothing can fully satisfy but he that made it: But when these are passionately desired and immoderately used, they then serve only to nourish and increase that fatal Distemper or Corruption of our Nature, which the Religion of our Blessed Lord is design'd to remove. Therefore to renounce him and his Gospel, for the Sake of any of the Honours, Profits, or Pleasures of this Life, is to renounce our only Remedy, and to bid adieu to all true Happiness. What are all the boasted Felicities of this lower World, when put in the Ballance with an exceeding and eternal Weight of Glory? And, besides, what Happiness can this World afford us, or procure for us, in any great or general Calamity, or under any grievous Sicknesses, Pains, and Disorders? At such Times of Danger and Distress, the Things of this World appear to be, what they really are, vain Helpers and miserable Comforters. Yea, *then* they can't be relished; *then* they can no longer please; *then* their Sweetness is all gone, and nothing but their Sting left behind; the Sting of Guilt and Sin, which will still stick fast in

the Soul, and is not to be removed without violent Struggle, and the Pangs of a deep and piercing Repentance. And now I come, in the

Fourth and last Place, to shew that all necessary or saving Truth, and solid Happiness, are only to be found in what our Blessed Saviour has recommended to our Belief and Practice — *Thou hast the Words of eternal Life.* But this Matter I consider'd and explain'd, in a great Measure, when I explain'd our Saviour's Beatitudes; and therefore may be excused from enlarging upon it at present. Some Things however it will be proper to observe here in general. By all necessary Truth, I mean all that is necessary to Salvation, all that concerns Religion and Divine Worship, and the Knowledge of God and of ourselves. All which is fully contained and clearly taught in the Holy Scriptures. And 'tis worth our observing, that the same great and necessary Truths are inculcated and illustrated in such a surprising and agreeable Variety of Stile, Matter, and Method, as if God had studied to please every one, and contrived to make his revealed Word, like what is reported of the *Manna* he gave the *Israelites*, suited to every Man's

Man's Palate, that is, applicable to all Tempers, and fitted to all Conditions and Capacities. For, 1. As to Difference of *Stile*, God here sometimes speaks to us in the Voice of Thunder, or as a roaring Lion, with such Terror and Majesty, as is enough to strike us dumb, and make all that hear him stand in Awe of him, and keep Silence before him. At other Times he speaks to us in the *still small Voice*, in such soft and gentle Language, and in so moving and endearing a manner, as is enough, one would think, to melt the most obdurate Sinner into Tendernefs and Compliance. Sometimes he condescends to talk and reason with us, in so plain and familiar a Strain, as might almost tempt us to forget our Distance, and to think him such a one as ourselves. And sometimes again he delivers himself in such high and lofty Language, as quite confounds our Thoughts and exceeds our Comprehension. Then as to *Matter*, the Fulness and Variety of this is so abounding and so overflowing, that the closest Application of a whole Life will not enable a Man to digest and comprehend the whole. Yea, after all the Searches and Inquiries of the present and past Ages, we may safely affirm, that the

whole Sense and Scope of the Sacred Writings is not yet fully explain'd or thoroughly understood. But then in this vast inexhaustible Treasury of Wisdom and Knowledge, tho' none can comprehend the whole, yet every one may find enough that is plain and level to his own Capacity, enough to make him wise unto Salvation. Here all Sorts and Conditions of Men are consulted, the weak in Faith, as well as the strong, the Sinner as well as the Saint, the Rich and the Poor, the Wise and the Ignorant, the Illiterate and the Learned. And there is nothing, I may say, that is necessary for us to know, or practise, with respect to Salvation, but what we have express'd or implied in this Book of God. Then, *lastly, as to Method*, here are so many different Ways of instructing Mankind in the most necessary and important Truths, and every one of these so excellent and so perfect in its Kind, that nothing like it is to be met with in any or in all the *Heathen* Writers put together. Here is *Milk for the Babes*, and *strong Meat for those that are of full Age*. Here are plain and familiar Instructions for Men of mean Attainments and flow of Understanding, in all the necessary Points of Faith, and
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for all the Rules of holy Living. And here are Miracles to convince, and Parables to instil some of the harsher Doctrines, and more disagreeable Precepts of Religion, into the Minds of those, who might be apt to reject or be offended at the plainer Method. Here are likewise the most remarkable and instructive Examples of all Kinds, to deter Men from the Ways of Vice and Wickedness, and to lead them into the Paths of Virtue and Holiness. In short, God seems to have adapted his Word to all the various Dispositions, Passions, and Affections of human Nature, and vouchsafed therein to *become all Things to all Men, if by any Means he might save some*. Sometimes endeavouring to win us to Obedience by his Promises, and sometimes to terrify us into Repentance by his Threatnings; sometimes to alarm our Consciences by his Judgments sent upon the old World, and sometimes to awaken us into a Sense of our Danger, by Predictions of what is still to come. And all this to bring us to a Life of Holiness here, and a State of Happiness hereafter; the great End and Design of God in all his various Dealings with, and Dispensations towards the Children of Men! Even his

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roughest Methods and harshest Precepts are all designed for the same End. For the Words of God are like God himself; *they wound and they heal, they kill and they make alive, they bring down to the Grave and raise up again.* They refine and purify our Souls, and fit us for the Enjoyment of himself. Well then may we say to our Blessed Saviour, *Thou hast the Words of eternal Life: Thy Word is Truth, and thy Word is Life.* But lest bare Words might not be sufficient, and that nothing might be wanting on his Part, he has given us likewise the most perfect Example, and ordain'd holy Mysteries as Pledges of his Love, and for a sensible Representation of what he has suffered for us; that by all this Variety of Ways and Methods, he may engage us to consult and promote our own Interest and Happiness, and labour to obtain the Crown that he has set before us, and be made Partakers of his heavenly Kingdom.

*Now to God the FATHER, God the SON,
and God the HOLY GHOST, be ascribed,
as is most due, all Honour, Power,
Thanksgiving, and Praise, henceforth
and for evermore. Amen.*

S E R-

SERMON IV.

*Christ's Example a most powerful
Means and Motive to Christian
Perfection.*

MATT. XI. 29, 30.

*Take my Yoke upon you, and learn of
me ; for I am meek and lowly in
Heart ; and ye shall find Rest unto
your Souls. For my Yoke is easy,
and my Burden is light.*

WHEN our Blessed Saviour, after his
Resurrection, ask'd St. Peter three
several Times, by way of Rebuke
for his threefold Denial of him, *Simon, Son
of Jonas, lovest thou me?* hereby gently re-
minding him of his Presumption and Fall ;
and then earnestly commanded him to feed
his

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his Flock, as the best Testimony he could give of his Sincerity and Affection; and afterwards signified by what Death he should at last glorify God; the penitent Apostle being somewhat recover'd from the Concern he was under at his Lord's thus seeming to question his Love to him, took the Liberty to ask something concerning the beloved Disciple that was then following *Jesus* in the Way—*Lord, and what shall this Man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me.* As if he had said, I have told you what concerns and relates to yourself, what you ought to do, and what will befall you in your latter Days. But this is no Reason why you should be inquisitive after the secret Decrees of Heaven in Things relating to others. You have nothing to do with them. Your only Business is to *follow* your Master; And 'tis your *Glory*, as well as *Duty*, to follow him; as it is likewise of every Christian beside. For *Christ* is the *Way*, as well as the *Truth*, and not only our Teacher and Instructor, but our Leader and Guide. As he went before the *Israelites* of old in a Pillar of Cloud by Day, and in a Pillar of Fire by Night, to lead them

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them in the Way wherein they should go; so he is the Light and Guide of all Christians, to conduct them in the Ways of Truth and Holiness; and invites and encourages them to come unto him by the Amiability and Condescension of his Example, by being made like unto them, and having been in all Points tempted like as they are, *yet without Sin.* He is *the good Shepherd*, as he describes himself, *and he calleth his own Sheep by Name, and leadeth them out; and when he putteth forth his own Sheep, he goeth before them, and the Sheep follow him.* That is, he has gone before them in all the Instances of Duty and Obedience, explained and enforced the Precepts he has given us by his own Example, and set in a true Light both the weightier and lesser Matters of the Law, having punctually observed the one, and not left the other undone. There is no Yoke that he lays upon us, but what he has borne before us, no Burden he imposes, but what he was content to undergo himself. Therefore in the Text he calls it *my Yoke*, and *my Burden*, the more to endear and recommend it to us.—*Take my Yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in Heart, and ye shall find Rest*

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Rest unto your Souls. For my Yoke is easy, and my Burden is light. The Words may be understood by way of Precept and Example both; but I shall consider them chiefly in the latter Sense, as that which I take to be principally intended by our Saviour in this Place, tho' not exclusive of the other. And therefore in speaking to them, I shall endeavour to shew in the *first* place, the peculiar Advantage which Christians enjoy by having the Benefit of *Christ's* Example. *Secondly*, I shall consider our Obligations in general to imitate and follow his Example. And, *thirdly*, point out some Particulars, especially that in the Text, in which we are more highly obliged and concerned to follow him. And, *fourthly* and *lastly*, explain more distinctly the Reason or Motive he urges in the last Words,—*For my Yoke is easy, and my Burden is light.*

And, *first*, Let us consider the peculiar Advantage which we Christians enjoy, by having the Benefit of *Christ's* Example. Our Advantage indeed, in this Respect, is not altogether so great and considerable as *theirs* was, who had the Happiness to see and converse with our Saviour in Person. This he plainly intimates

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intimates himself, when he says, *As long as I am in the World, I am the Light of the World.* And again, *Yet a little while is the Light with you ; walk while ye have the Light, lest Darkneſs come upon you.* And once more, *While ye have Light, believe in the Light, that ye may be the Children of Light.* From all which it appears, that the *Jews* and *Chriſtians* of thoſe Days had the Advantage of us in this Reſpect, *namely*, by having their Saviour preſent among them ; tho' this Opportunity and Advantage but few of them regarded or improved as they ought, which occaſion'd thoſe Complaints of the Evangelift St. *John* in the Beginning of his Goſpel——
He was in the World, and the World was made by him, and the World knew him not. The Light ſhineth in Darkneſs, and the Darkneſs comprehended it not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. So that *Chriſt's* Preſence, or perſonal Appearance, could be of Advantage only to thoſe, who willingly received him, and ſincerely believed in him. Theſe indeed were greatly benefited by his heavenly and divine Converſation. They ſaw in him the very Life of Godlineſs, and the Beauty of Holineſs, the Perfection of Wiſdom,

dom, and the Pattern of all Virtues. But we have only, in Comparison, a faint Copy, and a written Transcript, a short History of his Life, and some few Narratives of his Divine Discourses; which yet are sufficient for the Purposes for which they are given, if perused with Care, and applied with Diligence; if we frequently set his Example before our Eyes, and endeavour to transcribe it into our Souls: Especially if we consider, that the Want of his bodily Presence is fully supplied by the Coming since of the Holy Spirit, which he has promised to all those that believe and obey him. This he intimated to his Disciples, when he was about to leave them——*Nevertheless I tell you the Truth, it is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.* It was by his Inspiration, that the exemplary Life of the Blessed Jesus was at first recorded; and 'tis by the gracious Influence of the same Spirit, that we are enabled, in any measure, to follow this Example; and without his Aid and Assistance, our seeing and conversing with our Saviour in Person, had been of no real Benefit or Avail to

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us. We have therefore no Reason to envy the Privilege or Happiness of the first Christians in this Case; but rather abundant Cause to be thankful to God for the Benefit we still enjoy, in having this shining Example set before us in the Gospel, and the Promise of the Spirit to second our Endeavours in our Imitation of it. And this will appear to be a great and invaluable Privilege and Benefit, if we consider, 1. That *Christ's* Example is the most absolute and perfect Example that ever was shewn to the World. 2. That 'tis the safest we can follow, because the most perfect; and 3. That 'tis the most encouraging and condescending.

First, *Christ's* Example is the most absolute and perfect Example that was ever shewn to the World. 'Tis the most perfect and compleat in the whole and in every Part, free from all real Guilt and Contagion of Sin, without Blemish and without Spot, the only Pattern of unspotted Innocence that ever appear'd in the World. When St. *John* declares, that *the Word was made Flesh, and dwelt among us*, he explains his Meaning in the next Words, and tells us in what manner he dwelt amongst Men——*And we beheld his Glory,*

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Glory, the Glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of Grace and Truth. That is, his Conversation was such as became the only begotten of the Father, all heavenly and divine. His Words were with Authority and Power; the Law of Kindness was upon his Tongue, and his very Enemies could say, that *never Man spake as this Man.* And how indeed could it be otherwise, when he that spake was no less than the Son of God, the Word and Wisdom of the Father, *the Brightness of his Glory, and the express Image of his Person*; so perfect a Transcript of the Divine Original, that they who saw and heard, and conversed with him, saw and heard, and conversed with God the Father Almighty. For so he himself expressly declares in his Rebuke of the Apostle St. Philip, when he made this Request to him, *Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us.* Jesus saith unto him, *have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, shew us the Father?*
 — *The Words that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself, but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doth the Works.* That is, the Father both
 both

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both spoke and acted in and by the Son. And therefore, as were our Saviour's Words and Discourses, so were his Works and Actions, all venerable and amiable, designed and directed to the Glory of God and the Benefit of Mankind, full of Mercy and good Fruits. While he fed the Hungry, at the same time he instructed the Ignorant, and cloathed the Nakedness of their Understanding. While, with his healing Virtue, he cured the Sicknesses and Diseases of the People, by his heavenly Doctrine he removed their Prejudices, and scatter'd the Clouds of Error and Delusion. The whole Course of his more publick Life was one continued Scene of Charity and Beneficence to the Souls and Bodies of Men. He went about doing Good, and was never weary in well-doing. For he came, as he declares himself, to *fulfill all Righteousness*, and paid a perfect Obedience to the whole Law of God. Others have been eminent for some *particular* Graces or Virtues. We read of many such in the Old and New Testament. *Abraham* is celebrated for his *Faith*; *Moses* was famous for his *Meekness*, *Job* for *Patience*, *Elias* for *Zeal*, *Joshua* for *Fortitude*; and so of others. But the Blessed *Jesus* ex-

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cell'd in all. What is divided among the Saints, was united in him, and *of his Fulness have they all received.* In him every Grace was equally strong, every Virtue eminently bright and shining. In him all moral and spiritual Endowments were fully conspicuous in the highest Degree. Tho' we admire and revere the wonderful Progress and signal Attainments of the Saints in former Days, and of those that have excell'd in Virtue; yet at the same time we can't but see and observe in these the Marks of the Fall, some Remains of the old Man, some little Mixture of Evil with their Good, some Inconstancy and Variation in their Conduct, some Weaknesses, Blemishes, and Defects in the best and purest of the Sons of Men. But *Christ Jesus is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.* With him was no Variableness, or Shadow of Change. He was always equally disposed to Virtue, and ever ready to perform the Will of his Father. 'Twas as easy and natural for him to do Good, as 'tis for the corrupt and degenerate Race of *Adam* to do Evil. So that he was deficient in no Point; and left nothing undone, that ought to be done. Piety and Virtue resided in him, as in their native Seat,
and

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and were fixed in him, as in their proper Centre. Here then we have the most perfect Model of all Obedience. In him we may see all the great Lines of Duty, and all the Rules of Religion and Morality fairly drawn out into Practice. By him every Part of the Divine Law is applied, and shewn to be practicable. And therefore, if at any time we find any Difficulty or Obscurity in his Precepts, we must have Recourse to his Practice, and this will presently set us right, and explain what he means. If we doubt of the Rule, his Behaviour in like Cases must be our Guide and Director. And tho' the Rule may appear not only doubtful, but somewhat rigid, difficult, and frightful; yet when view'd in the Example, or as exemplified and beautified in his Actions, it will then appear plain, lovely, and inviting. And this is the

Second Particular that recommends *Christ's* Example to our Imitation, *namely*, that 'tis the *safest* Example we can follow, and that because 'tis the *most perfect*. For a perfect unfinning Example can never mislead or deceive us. But there is Danger in closely following, through every Instance, the Examples of others, even of the most eminent

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Saints that are set before us in the sacred Writings, especially those of the Old Testament; because we know not what particular Occasion, Warrant, or Commission, they might have for what they did; which is not always recorded. But there is no Danger of Copying after the Example of *Christ*, in every Instance of Duty and Obedience, so far as 'tis imitable by us, or propounded to our Imitation. And therefore *St. Paul*, after he had reckon'd up, in the eleventh Chapter of his Epistle to the *Hebrews*, almost all the Worthies of ancient Times, that had obtain'd a good Report through Faith; yet, in the Beginning of the next Chapter, he passes by all these, and directs us to the great Exemplar *Christ Jesus*—*Wherefore seeing we also are compass'd about with so great a Cloud of Witnesses, let us run with Patience the Race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our Faith.* Not that we are wholly confined to this Example, or that 'tis unlawful, in all Cases, to follow the Examples of others: But I am only observing now, that our Blessed Saviour's Example is the *safest* we can follow, and given to us or recorded for that End. Other Examples
may

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may be of Use and Advantage to us. Yea, there is no kind of Example, whether of those that are alive, or of those that are gone down to the Grave, whether of the Righteous or of the Wicked, but may be improved to the Ends and Purposes of good Living. The Examples of the Pious and Virtuous may be imitated so far as they are approved and commended by the Spirit of God, and in such Cases and Instances, as we know and are sure that they acted conformably to the Divine Law. And even the Examples of the Wicked and Ungodly are not without their Use and Service, as they naturally tend, and are designed or permitted by God, to work in us a greater Abhorrence and Detestation of Sin, a greater Care to avoid its Guilt and Punishment, and to fly from the Wrath to come; and to warn us of those Rocks and Precipices, those Dangers and Temptations, which, in steering their Course through this World, so many Souls have fatally split against. Thus may we extract Good out of Evil, grow wise at others Expence, and learn our Duty from their Disobedience. These are some of the Benefits we may reap from a due Consideration and Application of Examples in general:

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ral: But if we would have a sure unerring Guide to direct us in the right Way that leads to Heaven and Happiness; if we would not faint and be weary in the several tiresome Stages we are to pass, till we come to the Land of Promise, to *the Rest that remaineth for the People of God*; if we desire to overcome the Difficulties of Religion, the Corruptions of our own Nature, and the manifold Dangers of our present State: In a Word, if we are willing to attain those virtuous Habits and necessary Dispositions of Soul, that must qualify us for the Enjoyment of the heavenly Bliss, we must frequently and seriously view and consider *him*, who has gone before us in all the rough Paths of an active and passive Obedience, *him that speaks in Righteousness*, and is *mighty to save*, even the great Captain of our Salvation, *travelling in the Greatness of his Strength*, and overcoming Difficulties and Dangers that seemed to surpass all human Undertaking. This is our Pattern, and a greater and safer Pattern we can't have. For the Life of *Christ* is the Life of God manifested in the Flesh. And one of the great Ends of his Manifestation was, that he might teach us by his Example, as well as instruct us by his Doctrine; and

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and not only satisfy for our Sins, but go before us in the Ways of Holiness, that *as he was, so we might be in this World.* While we follow him, either in obeying or submitting to the Will of God, we are sure that we are in the right Way to Salvation, that we are directly pursuing our own Happiness, that we are doing what is pleasing in his Sight, what is highly advantageous to ourselves, what will certainly procure his Favour here, and the gracious Benediction of his heavenly Father hereafter. There is no Fear of miscarrying, while we endeavour to imitate our Saviour; no Fear of being abandon'd or disown'd by God, while we study to be transform'd into the Image of his Son; no Fear of mistaking or transgressing our Duty, while we have the Example of *Christ* before us, and are resolved to be guided and directed by it. Our only Danger is, when we lose Sight of him, and forget our Pattern. Then indeed our Duty will appear difficult, or obscure, and our Work become heavy and burdensome. But while we have Respect to him in what we say or do, and are inclined and disposed to follow his Steps, we are in a State of Liberty and Safety. For his Service

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is perfect Freedom, his Promise our best Protection, and his Example our surest Guide and Direction.

Thirdly, and lastly, As *Christ's* Example is the most *absolute* and *perfect*, and therefore the *safest* for us to follow; so is it likewise the most *encouraging* and *condescending*. When God spake to the Children of *Israel* on Mount *Sinai* at the Delivery of the Law, the Majesty he appeared in, and the Authority with which he spake, was so awful and terrible, that *Moses* himself is said to have *exceedingly feared and quaked*, and the People were so terrified and confounded, that they said, *Let Moses speak with us, and we will hear, but let not God speak to us, lest we die*. When God afterwards found that the Terror of his Threatenings and the Thunder of his Words had no lasting Effect upon that untractable People, and that the World by Wisdom knew not God, he resolved to take another Method with them, and was pleased at last to send his only Son into the World, cloathed with human Nature, to teach and reform Mankind by the gentle attractive Force of a holy Life and exemplary Conversation. *And the Word was made Flesh and dwelt amongst us*: And tho' he taught

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taught them as one having Authority, yet his Words were temper'd with Meekness and Bignity: And tho' many of his Actions shew'd him to be *God*, yet at the same Time they had all the Tenderness, Compassion, and Condescension of *Man*. He came to call Sinners to Repentance, and he invited and importuned all such to come unto him and learn of him, that they might find Rest unto their Souls; and promised that those who came to him, he would in no wise cast out. His whole Life indeed was made up of Greatness and Condescension, of Majesty and Humility. His wondrous Works proclaim'd the former, and his Readiness to do the meanest Offices for the Good of others, declared the latter. For, as he himself observes, he came *not to be minister'd unto, but to minister*; and did not disdain even to wash and wipe his Disciples Feet. And when he had done so, he said unto them, *Know ye what I have done unto you? Ye call me Master and Lord, and ye say well, for so I am: If I then your Lord and Master have washed your Feet, ye ought also to wash one another's Feet. For I have given you an Example that ye should do*
as

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as I have done unto you. And if so condescending an Example will not prevail with us to follow him, what is there beside that can encourage us to do it? If *Christ* stooped so low, to teach us our Duty towards one another; if he performed this surprising Action, for no other End that we know of, but only to oblige and shame his Followers into something of the like Acts of mutual Courtesy and Condescension; if the Lord and Master did not disdain to undertake the Office and to discharge the Duty of a Servant; nay, if he submitted at last to the Punishment of Slaves, and became *obedient unto Death, even the Death of the Cross*; if he not only lived, but died for us, and gave himself a Sacrifice for our Sins, should not all this strongly incline and powerfully persuade us, who profess ourselves his Servants and Followers, always most thankfully to receive that his inestimable Benefit, and also daily endeavour ourselves to follow the blessed Steps of his most holy Life? We can't imitate his Miracles, but we may his Mercy and Condescension; and if we imitate him here, we shall reign with him hereafter, when he shall come to receive and
reward

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reward his Followers, and to be admired of all them that believe and obey him.

To him therefore, with the FATHER, and the HOLY GHOST, be ascribed, as is most due, all Honour, and Glory, Obedience and Thanksgiving, now and for evermore. Amen.

S E R-

SERMON V.

*Christ's Example a most powerful
Means and Motive to Christian
Perfection.*

MAT T. xi. 29, 30.

*Take my Yoke upon you, and learn of
me; for I am meek and lowly in
Heart; and ye shall find Rest unto
your Souls. For my Yoke is easy,
and my Burden is light.*

ON E great End of our Blessed Saviour's coming into the World, was to give us such a perfect Pattern of all Virtues, as might enlighten our Minds, direct our Steps, and guide our Feet into the Way of Peace and Holiness. And there is no Virtue, no Precept, no Duty, but what he has eminently

nently fulfilled and exemplified, or recommended to our Practice by his own Example (except that of Repentance, of which he had no Need or Occasion) not in a glaring and pompous Manner, which might have served only to dazzle and confound Mankind, but in the most easy, agreeable, and natural Way, in order to invite and allure them to a careful Imitation of him. And did we set his Example continually before our Eyes, this would be not only a Light to direct us in all the darker Passages of Life, but a Means likewise to warm our Hearts, to inflame our Affections, and to provoke our Emulation. But of all the Virtues which he chose to adorn and beautify with his own Practice, there are none that appear to greater Advantage, or that shine with a brighter Lustre, than those of *Meekness* and *Humility*. These seem to have been his peculiar favourite Virtues, those which he most professedly teaches, those which he did most constantly practise, and those which he has most powerfully and pathetically recommended to his Disciples. — *Take my Yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in Heart; and ye shall find Rest unto your Souls. For my Yoke is easy, and my Burden is light.*

The

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The Words may be understood by way of Precept and Example both; but 'tis in the latter chiefly that I have considered them, as that which I take to be principally intended in this Place, tho' not exclusive of the other. And therefore in speaking to them, I proposed to shew, in the

First Place, the peculiar Advantage which Christians enjoy, by having the Benefit of *Christ's* Example.

Secondly, To consider our Obligations in general to imitate and follow his Example.

Thirdly, To point out some Particulars, especially those in the Text, in which we are more highly obliged and concerned to follow him. And

Fourthly, and lastly, To explain more distinctly the Reason or Motive he urges in the last Words — *For my Yoke is easy, and my Burden is light.*

Having consider'd the *first* of these Heads, I proceed, in the *second* Place, to lay before you the Reasons and Obligations we have to imitate and follow *Christ's* Example; which are principally these three, 1. That we can't be Followers of God, as we are required to be, unless we be likewise Followers of *Christ*.

2. Be-

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2. Because the History of his Life is written and recorded for this End chiefly, that we may follow his Steps; and 3. Because 'tis his own exprefs Command.

First then, we can't be Followers of God, as we are required to be, unless we be likewise Followers of *Christ*. We are commanded to be *Followers of God as dear Children*, to be *holy as God is holy*, to be *perfect as he is perfect*, to be *merciful as he is merciful*, to *love one another, as he hath loved us*. Now these Attributes and Perfections were manifested and exhibited to the World in the Life of the Blessed *Jesus*. We have not seen God at any time; we have neither heard his Voice, nor seen his Shape: But he hath spoken unto us by his Son; and by sending him into the World, he most eminently fulfilled, in one Sense, that Promise to his People — *I will walk in them, and dwell in them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my People*. The many gracious Works which our Saviour performed, while he was upon Earth, were performed by the Power of God dwelling in him. His Actions were the Actions of God, as they were the Effects of a Divine Power, and conformable to the Divine Pattern. His Humility

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mility was the Humility of God manifested in the Flesh. His Bounty and Beneficence to Mankind were the Love of God extended and communicated to his Creatures. So far then as we imitate the Example of our Saviour, so far we are transformed into the Divine Image. So far as we follow the Steps of his most Holy Life, so far we become like unto God. So far as we resemble him who is the Son of God by Nature, so far we ourselves are made the Children of God by Adoption and Grace. For the Image of God, in which Man was at first created, and which was defaced by the Fall, can only be recovered and renewed by a Conformity to the Image and Example of our Lord and Saviour. Great Reason therefore have we to set this Pattern before us, that by comparing our Life with the Life of the Holy *Jefus*, we may see our Defects, and labour to amend them; that by often viewing and contemplating his amiable Perfections, we may aspire to true Greatness of Soul, and be willing to take his Yoke upon us, and learn of him, who is *the Image of the invisible God, the First-born of every Creature*; that so we may become Children and Heirs of God, and Partakers of the Divine Nature.

Secondly,

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Secondly, Another Reason or Obligation for our Imitation of *Christ*, is because the History of his Life is written and recorded chiefly for this End, that we might follow his Steps. As *all Scripture* in general, so the History of our Saviour's Life in particular, *is given by Inspiration of God, and is profitable for Doctrine, for Reproof, for Correction, for Instruction in Righteousness, that the Man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good Works.* For our Blessed Lord was not content to come down from Heaven, only to reveal his Father's Will to Mankind, and to give them a Body of excellent Laws, for the Government and Conduct of human Life, or to describe and point out, as in a Map, the Road and Way to Heaven, but he would shew them the Way himself, and go before them in all the Instances of a moral, spiritual, and divine Life; that so he might plainly convince them, that he did not impose or require Things that were impracticable or unattainable, that they might see and believe, that that Measure of Goodness, and that State of Perfection, which he invited and encouraged them to aspire after, was within the Reach of their Capacities, when strengthen'd

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and assisted by Succour from above. For the same Spirit that dwelt in him, and was given to him without Measure, would enable all true Believers to attain the same Virtues and to perform the same Duties that he did, tho' not in so high and eminent Degree, yet in a worthy and acceptable Manner. We ought therefore, with a serious Application and Diligence, to read and consider the History of our Saviour's Life, both in the Way of Imitation and in the Way of Encouragement, that we may learn to practise those Things which he was eminent for, and be satisfied at the same Time that they are practicable, or that he has commanded us nothing but what he has done himself, and will enable us to do likewise. If we read the Gospel with this Intent, we shall soon see the Benefit and reap the Advantage of it. If we thus *behold, as in a Glass, the Glory of the Lord*, or his glorious Example, we shall be *changed by Degrees into the same Image, from Glory to Glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord*. Men are apt to contract a Likeness of Temper with those they frequently converse with, and to learn their Manners and Behaviour. And if we would thus converse with our Saviour in his Word,
and

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and by Prayer and Meditation, we should come at last to resemble him, in some Measure, both in the outward Life, and in the inward Temper and Disposition of Soul, to be of the same Spirit that he was of, to be *meek and lowly in Heart*. And the Reason why Christians are generally so unlike their Saviour, and do so little resemble him in their Lives and Conversations, is because they so seldom peruse the History of his Life, because they don't *endeavour* to follow him, nor *propound* him to themselves as a Pattern most worthy of Imitation. Whereas if they view'd him more closely and frequently, they would be more delighted with the Thoughts of him, and be more willing and desirous to copy after him, especially if they consider'd, in the

Third Place, that this is his own express Command. *Take my Yoke upon you, and learn of me*. And as he tells his Disciples, *I have given you an Example that ye should do as I have done unto you*; so we are told by his Apostle, *that he hath left us an Example that we should follow his Steps*: And therefore he has often commanded us to *follow him*, and assured us, that if we do not follow him, we are *not worthy of him*, and *cannot be his*

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Disciples. As therefore his Precepts are recommended and enforced by his Example; so the Imitation of his Example is likewise bound by his own Command. Nay, he commands us, not only to follow him in general, but to deny ourselves, and to take up our Cross. And if we are obliged to follow him in the hardest Instance of passive Virtue, we are certainly much more obliged to imitate him in all the lesser Duties of an active Obedience. When he warned his Disciples of what they must expect to meet with in the World, and what they were to undergo, he reminded them at the same Time of his own Sufferings, and shewed them from thence the Reasonableness and Equity of their being made conformable to him in this Respect. For, says he, *the Disciple is not above his Master, nor the Servant above his Lord; It is enough that the Disciple be as his Master, and the Servant as his Lord.* As we may be sure in general, that he has commanded us nothing but what is *reasonable*; so sometimes he vouchsafes to give us the Reason of what he commands, as he does in the present Case. We might have been apt to excuse ourselves from following him, by saying or thinking, that as the Union of the
Divine

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Divine with the Human Nature in his Person, exempted him from all Sin, and set him above the Reach of Temptation, he might perform many Things in the Way of Duty, which to mere Men might appear impracticable, in the present State of Frailty and Corruption. But not to insist, that what is wanting in us, God has promised to supply by his Spirit, we may observe that our Lord turns the Argument the other Way, and draws a forcible Motive not from his Privilege, but from his Condescension. *The Disciple is not above his Master*. As if he had said, if a Person of such supereminent Dignity as he was, and so infinitely superiour to us, in every Respect, did not disdain to do and suffer such Things; certainly *we*, who are his Inferiours, his Servants, and his Creatures, should not think it any way hard or unreasonable to submit to the same. Does that Man deserve the Name of a *Soldier*, that refuses to follow his Captain, tho' it be upon the most frightful and hazardous Undertaking? And is that Christian worthy to be called a Disciple of *Christ*, that is afraid, or scruples, to do what his Master has done before him? Or is he fit to be employ'd as a Servant, that neglects the Work of a Servant, or refuses to discharge such Offices, as

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his Lord himself did not think it beneath him to perform? There are several Duties or Injunctions, which the unspotted Innocence and real Divinity of our Blessed Saviour, might have exempted him from the Observation of; which yet he voluntarily submitted to, when he was under no other Necessity, or Constraint, but that of powerful Love, and a Readiness to perform the whole Will of God, and to set us an Example of a perfect Obedience. Therefore did he freely submit to the painful Rite or Ceremony of *Circumcision*, designed and ordained only for those that were conceived and born in Sin; while *He* was conceived by the Holy Ghost, and born without the least Spot or Stain of Guilt, and came to save his People from their Sins. The Law required that every *First-born* among Men should be *Holy to the Lord*, that is, offered in Sacrifice, or redeemed with a Price. This Law likewise our Lord fulfilled, when he was presented in the Temple, in the Substance of our Flesh, tho' he himself was the *Redeemer* of Mankind, and came to redeem them from all Iniquity. If it be said, that what was done to our Saviour in the Time of his Infancy, can be no Rule or Pattern to us, in this Case, because he
may

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may be supposed to be then not capable of any voluntary Act; I answer, that this is true indeed with respect to the Children of Men, during their *Infant-state*, when the Soul lies dormant, and the rational Powers are unactive, and have neither the Freedom nor the Capacity of *Willing*. But when *the Word was made Flesh*, and the Son of God became incarnate, from that Time every Transaction and Event, relating to him, or to which he was subject, even the mean Circumstances of his humble Birth, are to be esteemed as the Effect of a voluntary Choice or Condescension, or both. For, tho' he suffered these Things only in the Flesh, and was not capable of preventing them, or choosing otherwise, as to his human Nature; yet all this came to pass, or was permitted by the determinate Counsel and free Submission of that Divine Person, who is called the Word or Son of God: And therefore, according to that allowed Maxim in Divinity of a *Communication of Properties*, the Designs and Actions that were impossible to one Nature, being possible to the other, may be fitly ascribed to both, or to the whole Person, *Christ Jesus*. However, not to insist now on this, because there is no Occasion, we

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may observe the like humble Compliance in our Saviour, with respect to Things not necessary or binding to him, after he was come to Maturity of Age and Understanding, and had the full and free Exercise of his Will, in his Human as well as Divine Nature. Thus, when he was about thirty Years old, he voluntarily submitted to the Baptism of *John*, which was only a Baptism of Repentance, tho' he himself needed no Repentance. And when *John*, knowing the Dignity and Divinity of his Person, scrupled to do it, and therefore *forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptised of thee, and comest thou to me? Jesus said unto him, Suffer it to be so now; for thus it becometh to fulfil all Righteousness.* Then he suffered him. Since then our Blessed Lord has commanded us to follow him, to take his Yoke upon us, and to learn of him; and since he has commanded us nothing but what is reasonable in itself, and really for our Good; nothing but what he himself was content to perform; nay, since he has fulfilled some Parts of the Law in a higher Measure and Degree, than was originally intended (for *the Law was not made for a righteous Man*, for one of spotless Innocence and absolute Purity) and, lastly,
since

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since the Person that has given us such Commands, and shewn us such an Example, is no less than the eternal Son of his eternal Father, Greater than the Angels, and Higher than the Heavens, *the Holy One of God*: Since this, I say, is the Case, we should be ashamed as well as afraid to think of excusing ourselves from following this perfect Pattern of Righteousness and Goodness, having nothing to plead or offer for ourselves, for such Neglect. Let us then, instead of framing Excuses, set ourselves, with Resolution and Vigour, to copy after the Example of our tender and compassionate Saviour, and follow the blessed Steps of his most holy Life. And let not the Glory and Brightness of the Example terrify and dishearten us. If we can't follow him so far as we *would*, let us endeavour at least to do it as far as we are *able*. A willing Mind is always accepted, and sincere Endeavours are never in vain. What at first may be thought impracticable, will become easy by Degrees; and 'tis often one Half of our Work to have made a good Beginning. The Holy Spirit will then both encourage and enable us to go on. We may not many of us perhaps have made any considerable Progress *as yet* in our Imitation of
Christ;

Christ; but we may and ought to be *humble* under a Sense of our mean Attainments hitherto, and resolve to be more careful and diligent for the Time to come. And this we shall be, if we duly remember and always bear in mind, that a Conformity to *Christ* is both the Duty and Glory of a Christian; and that if we follow his Steps, and study to be like him here, he will own and receive us for his, in the Presence of Men and Angels hereafter.

Now to God the FATHER, God the SON, and God the HOLY GHOST, be ascribed, as is most due, all Honour and Glory, Might, Majesty, Obedience, and Thanksgiving, now, henceforth, and for evermore. Amen.

S E R M O N VI.

*Christ's Example a most powerful
Means and Motive to Christian
Perfection.*

MATT. xi. 29, 30.

*Take my Yoke upon you, and learn of
me ; for I am meek and lowly in
Heart ; and ye shall find Rest unto
your Souls. For my Yoke is easy,
and my Burden is light.*

TH O' these Words may be understood
by way of Precept and Example
both, yet I proposed to consider them
chiefly in the latter Sense, as that which
seems principally intended by our Blessed Sa-
viour in this Place ; who plainly propounds
himself in this Passage as a Pattern to all
Christians,

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Christians, directs them accordingly to *learn of him*, and calls the Duties he requires of them *his Yoke* and *his Burden*, as being no other than what he himself has borne and undergone before them. And therefore in speaking to them, I have already consider'd the peculiar Advantage which we Christians enjoy by having the Benefit of *Christ's Example*; and our Obligations in general to imitate and follow this Example. The Benefits of *Christ's Example* I endeavour'd to make appear, by considering that this is the most absolute and perfect Example that ever was shewn to the World; that 'tis the safest Example we can follow, because the most perfect, and that 'tis the most encouraging and condescending. Our Obligations to follow him, I told you, were principally these three, 1. That we can't be Followers of *God*, as we are required to be, unless we be likewise Followers of *Christ*. 2. That the History of his Life is written and recorded for this End chiefly, that we may follow his Steps; and, 3. Because this is his own express Command. And now I come, under my

Third general Head, to inquire what those particular Duties are, in which we are more especially

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especially obliged and concern'd to imitate this great Example. I have already observ'd, that *Christ* is set forth to us in Scripture, as a Pattern of universal Obedience : But to consider this Point a little more distinctly, it may be proper to take a short View of this perfect Pattern, with respect to the three great Branches of Duty, towards God, our Neighbour, and ourselves.

First, *Christ* is our Pattern with respect to our *Duty to God*. He tells us himself, that *he came down from Heaven, not to do his own Will, but the Will of him that sent him*. And yet as *his Will* was perfectly upright and pure, it is certain, that he could *will* nothing that was sinful and unlawful, nothing that was contrary or repugnant to the Law of God. But then, as by assuming our Nature he became subject to our Infirmities, Necessities, and Wants, he might, in innocent and indifferent Matters, have a Will somewhat different from the Will or Intention of his Father ; otherwise he could not have pray'd, under his Agony, to have that bitter Cup removed from him. But even here he presently corrected himself, suppress'd the vehement Reluctance and Antipathies of Nature,
and

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and was all Submission and Obedience.—
Nevertheless not my Will, but thine be done.
 In performing therefore his Duty to God, or
 in keeping his Father's Commandments, he
 had Respect not only to Things *lawful*, but
 to Things indifferent; in doing or forbearing
 of which, he consulted not so much his own
 natural Inclinations, tho' never so innocent,
 as the Will and Pleasure of him that sent
 him; always preferring his Duty to God
 before any other Obligations, whenever they
 happen'd to interfere. The first Act of Obe-
 dience that he perform'd, the first Words that
 he utter'd, which we have upon Record, was an
 Instance of his Duty in this Respect, or of his
 great Regard to his heavenly Father. For when
 his Parents went up with him to *Jerusalem* at
 the Feast of the Passover, and at the End of the
 Feast were returning Home, he withdrew him-
 self from them, and retired to the Temple, and
 was there found employ'd *in the midst of the*
Doctors, both hearing them and asking them
Questions. And when his Mother said to
 him, *Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us?*
 His Answer was, *Wist you not that I must be*
about my Father's Business? So early did he
 begin to shew the different Regard he had
 for

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for his heavenly Father and his earthly Parents; neglecting the one for a time, that he might serve and attend upon the other, tho' he was sure thereby to create them some Trouble and Sorrow. But after he had discharged his Duty to God, he then readily obey'd his real and reputed Parents. And as the Evangelist observes, *He went down with them to Nazareth, and was subject unto them.* Now this is exactly agreeable to what he afterwards taught and required of his Disciples. — *He that loveth Father or Mother more than me, is not worthy of me.* And that other Precept of his is founded upon the same Principle — *Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness, and all these Things shall be added unto you.* It should therefore be our first, our only Concern, in Imitation of his Example, to approve ourselves unto God; and in the mean while to leave all other Affairs and Events to his wise Disposal, *casting all our Care upon him, who careth for us,* and who never faileth them that seek him. At another time, as he was teaching the People in some House, and while he was yet talking to them, one came to him and interrupted him, saying, *Behold thy Mother and thy Brethren stand without,*

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without, desiring to speak with thee ; but he answer'd and said unto him that told him, Who is my Mother, and who are my Brethren? And he stretch'd forth his Hands towards his Disciples, and said, Behold my Mother and my Brethren. For whosoever shall do the Will of my Father which is in Heaven, the same is my Brother, and Sister, and Mother. In which he teaches us by his Words, as well as by his Example, that Religious Exercises are to be perform'd without Disturbance and Distraction, that we should not suffer our Minds and Affections to be drawn off by any the nearest Relations, or by any temporal Concerns and Consideration ; and that if we happen to lose any thing by a close Attendance on such holy Employments, the God whose we are, and whom we serve, will abundantly supply the Defect, and receive us into a more honourable Relation with himself. And farther, as he taught his Disciples to pray, and left behind him an admirable Form and Model of Prayer for all Christians ; so he has instructed us in this great Duty by his own Example, often retiring into some Desert or private Place from the Multitude, and even from his own Disciples, to pray to his
Father,

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Father, and sometimes continued all Night in Prayer to God : Tho' he had not that Occasion for Prayer as we have. Almost all *our* Prayers do and must consist in Confession of Sins, in Petitions for Pardon, in Supplications for Mercy, and in asking fresh Supplies of Grace and Assistance from the Holy Spirit. But our Blessed Saviour had no Sins to confess, no Pardon to ask for himself, and, as *John* Baptist testifies, *God gave not the Spirit by Measure unto him.* Therefore the Subject of his Prayers could, for the main, be nothing but Intercession and Thanksgiving. A Form of which we have in the seventeenth Chapter of *St. John*, where he prays first briefly for himself, then more largely for his Apostles, and lastly for all those that should believe on him through their Word. I might farther enlarge on this Example with respect to this first Branch of Obedience, *our Duty towards God* ; but to insist on all that might be said on this Occasion, would be too copious for Discourses of this Nature ; and therefore I proceed to the

Second Branch of Obedience, our Duty towards our Neighbour. And here our Lord's Example is of singular Use and Service to us.

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'Twas his Love to Mankind that brought him down from Heaven. And therefore we may be sure, that when he condescended to be made like unto them, and to dwell among them, he would do nothing but what was strictly consistent with their true Interest and Welfare, and with the Duties of the second Table of the Decalogue. He always paid a ready Obedience to his Parents, whenever it was not inconsistent with his Duty to God; and his last Concern seems to have been for his Mother, being mindful of her as he hung upon the Cross, and in his dying Agonies recommending her to the Care of his beloved Disciple. His Subjection to the Civil Powers he sufficiently declared, by declining the Offer of the People to make him a King, by industriously avoiding all Occasions of Suspicion and giving Offence, by commanding others to pay Tribute to *Cesar*, and by working a Miracle to pay a Tribute or Custom himself, that he was not, in Strictness, obliged to pay. Tho' he patiently endured almost all kinds of Injuries from others, yet he was so far from doing the least Injury to them, that on the contrary, in Observance of his own Rules and Directions, *when he*

was

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was reviled, he reviled not again, when he suffer'd he threaten'd not ; but did good to them that hated him, and pray'd for them that despitefully used him and persecuted him. When the Samaritans would not receive him, and his angry Apostles were for calling for Fire from Heaven to consume them, he rebuked their intemperate Zeal, and quietly departed to another Place. When Judas came to betray him with the Symbol of Peace, with the Token of Kindness, he call'd him by no other than his own Name, and gave him still the Title of *Friend*. When one of the Servants of the High-priest came to apprehend him, and *Peter* unseasonably drew his Sword, and cut off his right Ear, he check'd the too forward Zeal of his Apostle, and with a merciful Touch miraculously healed the Wound. When another of those Servants rashly and rudely struck him with the Palm of his Hand, saying, *Answerest thou the High-priest so?* he gave him only this just and gentle Rebuke, — *If I have spoken Evil, bear Witness of the Evil; but if well, why smitest thou me?* Under the greatest Provocations, he was either silent or dispassionate; and persisted in his Endeavours to convince and do good to those,

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who reviled his Person, traduced his Doctrine, and blasphemed his Miracles. His constant Employment indeed, in spite of all Opposition, was doing good either to the Souls or Bodies of Men. Most of his miraculous Works were Works of Mercy, designed not only for the Conviction of Unbelievers, but for the Relief of the Indigent and Miserable; and to teach us how we should endeavour to remove the Effects of Sin, and help to lessen and abate the Sorrows and Calamities of Mankind. For when he fed so many Thousands with a few Loaves and small Fishes; when he cleansed the Lepers, and raised the Dead, made the Blind to see, the Deaf to hear, the Dumb to speak, and the Lame to walk: In a Word, when he cured all manner of Sickneffes, and all manner of Diseases among the People, he left us an Example herein that we should follow his Steps, and shewed us what a great and godlike Thing it is to do Good! We can't indeed work Miracles, as he did; but we can shew Mercy. He only employ'd his own *Divine* Power for the Benefit of Mankind; and we ought to employ our own *natural* Power for the same great End. If *he* was pleased to supply all Wants, and to
remove

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remove all Maladies, without any visible Means; certainly 'tis *our* Duty to make use of the Means we have for carrying on the like gracious and charitable Designs. I come now, in the

Third Place, to consider our Saviour's Example, with respect to the last general Branch of Obedience, *our Duty towards ourselves*. The Duty a Man owes himself, consists in the due Government of his Senses, Passions, and Appetites, and in not thinking more highly of himself than he ought to think. But our Blessed Saviour had no irregular Passions or Appetites: His natural Inclinations were all subservient to the *rational* Powers; and these again as readily obeyed the Dictates of the *Divine*. We have no particular Account indeed of his observing the great Duty of *Temperance*: But we may be sure, that he, who could deny himself the Supports and Refreshments of Nature for forty Days together, had a perfect Command over himself, in every thing relating to the sensual or animal Life; tho' he no where affects or desires to be thought a rigid Observer of Fasting and Abstinence. On the contrary, after his Temptation in the Wilderness, he lived more freely and openly;

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and tells us himself, that *the Son of Man was come eating and drinking*. And accordingly we find him present at several Feasts, only taking Occasion at such times to teach or explain some necessary or important Doctrine. And when the *Pharisees* blamed his Disciples for not using the same Fasting, as *John's* Disciples did ; he neither denied the Charge, nor excused them from the Duty ; but only replied, that That was not the proper Season ; and then intimated, that a Time was coming, when his Disciples should as duly observe that Part of Duty, as any that had gone before them. Then as to his exemplary *Meekness* and *Humility*, which he so particularly recommends to us in the Text, as if he had nothing else to teach, or we nothing farther to learn of him, this will appear to have been extraordinary and even astonishing in him, if we consider, that he could not possibly think too highly of himself, as he was God, nor speak too much in his own Vindication, as he was the innocent Lamb of God, without Blemish, and without Spot. Yet none more lowly in Heart, none more meek or reserved in Word or Conversation, and none more humble in outward Appearance or Deportment.

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portment. His Humility was the Astonishment of Angels, and it would be strange, if it should not likewise be the Admiration of Men. As he was the highest by Nature, so he became the lowest by voluntary Submission and Choice; for which perhaps we can give no other Reason, but that *our Pride* stood in need of such a Remedy and Example, to mortify and subdue it. For as Man fell by Pride; so he was to be recovered only by Humility: And therefore did this Lover of Souls, in his wondrous Undertaking, vouchsafe to veil his Godhead in a Tabernacle of Flesh, to disguise and disfigure himself in the Eye of the World, and to appear in a different Form from what he was in Reality or by Nature, in the Form of a Servant, and in the Form of a Sinner; that he might make a suitable Atonement for our affecting to be as Gods, and give us a lively Representation and a just Idea of our own Nature and Condition, of our Sin and Misery, in his amazing Sufferings and Humiliation. All his Actions were seasoned and tinged with this great Principle of Piety and Goodness; and we can't but observe a Strain of Meekness, Modesty, and Moderation (tho' not without a

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Mixture of Majesty and Authority) running through all his Discourses. Humility, Meekness, and Charity, were the peculiar Badges by which he distinguished himself, and by which he would have his Disciples to be known. And that, as for other Reasons, so particularly for that mention'd in the Text, that they might *find Rest to their Souls*. For, as he assures us, *his Yoke is easy, and his Burden light*. Which is the

Fourth and last general Head I propos'd to consider. And here we may observe, that our Saviour has not only enforced these Duties or Virtues by the Authority of his Command, and strongly obliged us to the Study and Practice of them, by his own outward Example, but likewise farther recommended them to us from his own intimate Sense and Experience of the blessed Fruits and Advantages of them, of that Peace and Serenity of Mind that always wait upon the Meek and Humble. He that feels in himself the happy Effects of Meekness and Lowliness of Heart, and knows and perceives what it is to be quiet, contented, and easy in his own Mind, is the best Judge and Witness in this Case. And such was our Blessed Saviour,

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Saviour, in the highest Degree; and, as his Judgment is infallible, so his Testimony in this Point is unquestionable. 'Tis true, he had none of those boisterous Passions that we have, to ruffle and discompose him, no inordinate Affections and Appetites to break or interrupt the Peace and good Government of his Mind. He was all Calmness in the midst of Storms, all Love and Forgiveness in the midst of Injuries and Enemies. And this shews, that the most grievous Yoke we can bear, and the heaviest Burdens we can undergo, are those which our own unmortified Lusts and Passions impose upon us. There are no Tempests in external Nature, like those that Anger raises within a Man's own Breast; no such Disorders and Commotions, as those which Pride and Envy are apt to create. He that has gained a compleat Mastery over these, has a Kingdom established within him; and he that is continually subject to these, is a Slave to the worst kind of Tyranny. While we are meek, humble, and lowly-minded, we are in our proper natural State, in that State which God and Nature designed we should be in; and we no sooner transgress the Bounds of these Duties, but we make a Breach
upon

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upon the Spirit for the Enemy to enter in, and lay ourselves open to all his furious Invasions and Assaults. Nor can we recover and resettlement the Peace of our Minds, till by Repentance we purge out the old Leaven, and return to our former State of Meekness and Lowliness of Heart. This is the true Rest of the Soul : Yea, This is God's Rest : *Here will I dwell*, says he, *for I have a Delight therein*; even *with him that is of a contrite and humble Spirit, to revive the Spirit of the Humble, and to revive the Hearts of the contrite ones.* Yea, This is the Rest which our Saviour himself enjoyed, and which he promises to all that follow his Example——
Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in Heart, and ye shall find Rest unto your Souls. And how great was the Rest that resided in the Soul of the Blessed Jesus ! How full of Delight, Sedateness, and Serenity ! He carried a Heaven about him, whilst he dwelt upon Earth, and being no way concerned, as to himself, for Censure or Applause, was above the Temptations and Terrors of the World. This was the last Legacy he bequeath'd to his Disciples — *Peace I leave with you ; MY Peace I give unto you.* He that enjoys this
Peace

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Peace is secure in the midst of Trouble, and more happy than Words can express. But this, in the Nature and Reason of Things, can be the Portion only of the Meek, Humble, and Sincere; of those that have, in some good measure, by the Help of Grace, subdued their unruly Passions and Affections, that are willing to follow the Steps of their Blessed Master, and labour to bring into Subjection every Thought to the Obedience of *Christ*. And what should hinder us from engaging in this most necessary and important Work, upon which the Happiness of both Worlds depends? But not to speak now of the Rewards of the other World, let me only observe, that we suffer more at present, by living under the Dominion of Sin, than we should do by vigorously attempting the entire Conquest of it. And when we have gained this Conquest, all is Peace, and Joy, and Security. *For the Work of Righteousness is Peace, and the Effect of Righteousness, Quietness and Assurance for ever.* Let not then the Difficulty of the Attempt discourage us, or make us refuse any longer our Blessed Lord's gracious Invitation, to submit to his Discipline and Government, to obey his Precept, and imitate

tate his Example. He only invites us to throw off our own Burden, and to take up his; to exchange the greater for the less, to cast off the heavy Yoke and Burden of Sin, which neither we nor our Fathers were able to bear, and to take up *his Yoke*, which is *easy*, and *his Burden*, which is *light*. If we can hardly be persuaded to believe our Saviour's Testimony in this Case, let us make the Trial ourselves, and then we shall be convinced by Sense and Experience. Then we shall feel and perceive, how blessed and comfortable a Thing it is to be at Peace with God, with ourselves, and with the World, to have no Malice or Hatred in our Hearts, to be free from the Perturbations of unruly Passions, to think well of others, and meanly of ourselves, to follow the Steps and be conformed to the Image of our Blessed Redeemer; the best Disposition for Light and Comfort in this Life, and the only sure Way to Joy and Happiness in the next.

Now to God the FATHER, God the SON, and God the HOLY GHOST, be ascribed, as is most due, all Honour and Glory, Thanksgiving and Praise, for ever and ever. Amen.

S E R-

SERMON VII.

The Stability, Progress, and Perseverance of Christians, the Fruit and Effect of Divine Grace.

I PET. V. 10, 11.

The God of all Grace, who hath called us unto his eternal Glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered awhile, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. To him be Glory and Dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

SAint Peter having, in the five preceding Verses, exhorted Christians to the Practice of Humility and Sobriety, to great Vigilance against their spiritual Adversary, who *as a roaring Lion walketh about seeking whom*
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he may devour, whom they were to resist and overcome by a Stedfastness in the Faith and by a patient enduring of Afflictions, which he tells them were not peculiar to *some*, but common to *all* Christians, *as knowing that the same Afflictions are in accomplished in your Brethren that are the World*, concludes all with an earnest Prayer for their Perseverance and Establishment, which he delivers in the Form of a solemn Benediction: That is, he prays for the Blessings he mentions, and is a Means at the same Time of conveying the Blessings he prays for. For the Apostolical Benediction was always attended with Efficacy and Success. The Apostles were invested with a Power of Blessing and Cursing. They could deliver *to* Satan, and deliver *from* Satan. They were Instruments in the Hands of God to inflict Punishments and bestow Benefits upon Mankind. But tho' St. *Peter's* Words in my Text are capable of such a Construction, and might import thus much *at the first*; there is no Necessity of restraining them to this Sense *at present*. They may now be considered in the general Way, as a Direction and Exhortation to all Christians to seek and to labour after what the Apostle here wishes and implores

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plores for them, *namely, that the God of all Grace, who has called them to his eternal Glory by Christ Jesus, after they had suffered awhile, would make them perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle them.* In which Words we are directed to consider the Author of our Virtue and Happiness, the Means and Method of our Redemption, and the whole Duty and Progress of a Christian from his first Admission into a State of Grace to his last Consummation in Glory, and to whom he is indebted for these wonderful Dispensations of Grace and Favour.

First, We are here directed to consider the Author of our Virtue and Happiness, stiled here *the God of all Grace, who hath called us unto his eternal Glory by Christ Jesus.* Now whatever Sense we take the Word *Grace* in (and various are the Senses of it in the New Testament) 'tis entirely to be ascribed to God, either as *inherent* in him, or as *communicated* by him. *As inherent in him,* 'tis no other than the Attribute of his Goodness, by which he is always disposed to do Good, and by which he was moved at first to create the World, and to constitute different Kinds of spiritual Beings, to partake of the Emanations of his di-
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vine Bounty, and to set forth his most noble Praise. 'Twas the pure unmerited Grace of God, that first called into Being Angels and Men, that placed Angels in Heaven, and *Adam* in Paradise; that gave the former a nearer Access to his glorious Presence, that honours them with the Confidence of his Secrets, and the immediate Execution of his Commands; and endowed the latter with many excellent Talents and high Prerogatives, that made him Lord of this lower World, and gave him Dominion over the Works of his Hands, that stamped his own Likeness upon him, that breathed into him the Breath of Life, created him to be immortal, and made him to be an Image of his own Eternity. And had Man persevered in Duty to his Maker, and continued in a State of Innocence, he must have stood deeply indebted to God, both for the Preservation of his Innocence and for the Enjoyment of Happiness, yea, for all that he was, or could be possessed of. For even in this Case, there would have been nothing that he could properly call his own, nothing but what was indulged him by the free Bounty of Heaven. Had he stood his Ground in the Day of Trial, rejected the Temptation, and
vanquish-

vanquished the Tempter, he would still have had nothing to boast of; but must have ascribed the Glory of his Conquest entirely to him, who had endowed him with Liberty and Integrity of Will, and made him capable of standing. The same may be truly affirmed of the *elect Angels*, who at the Fall of the apostate Angels kept their first State, and maintain'd their original Integrity. This was likewise owing to *free Grace*, whether we suppose their Standing to have been the Effect of their own natural Strength, or of any additional Aids vouchsafed to them at the Time of that dreadful Apostacy. For both are equally the free Gift of God. But when Angels fell from Heaven, and Man soon after was involved in the like Guilt and Misery, how great then was the Grace and Goodness of God, to make a Distinction between them, to rescue one from the Destruction of the other, and restore him to the Capacity of recovering his former State? This was *all Grace*; not merely free undeserved Grace, but Grace superabundant and extraordinary. And this is what we now properly call *Mercy*, which is exercised towards Creatures, not only undeserving of the Favour of God, but justly obnoxious to the

terrible Effects of his severest Wrath and Indignation. For *he that spared not the Angels that sinned*, what should move him to spare Man, that had been guilty of the like Apostacy and Disobedience, but his own infinite Propensity to *shew Mercy on whom he will have Mercy*, and his gracious Purpose to raise to himself Monuments and Trophies of his Goodness from Objects the most vile and despicable in themselves? For nothing can be viler in the Sight of a pure God, than Man in his natural State of Sin and Corruption. The only Thing then that made a Difference or Distinction between fallen Man and the fallen Angels, was extraordinary and uncommon Grace. 'Twas Grace that first distinguished those higher Beings into several Orders of *Angels and Archangels, Cherubim and Seraphim, Thrones, Dominions, Principalities, and Powers*, that made them differ from one another in Dignity and Station, *as one Star differeth from another Star in Glory*. And as the Highest of those Orders are indebted to God for all they have; so the lowest could not have been what they are, but by his free Bounty and Liberality. 'Twas Grace that afterwards separated the elect Angels from the Apostate, and secured these from falling, while

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while the other were left to perish in their Rebellion. But the most stupendous Instance of Divine Grace and Favour, is the Redemption of Man. God was exceeding Good and Bountiful to him *before* his Fall, but his Mercy to him *after* his Fall is Matter of the highest Admiration and Astonishment: And that, whether we consider his sinful and his miserable Condition by his Transgression, or the surprising Means by which he is recovered into the Way of Salvation, or that high State of Glory and Happiness, which he is now made capable of attaining. Of each of these very briefly. *First*, The Grace and Mercy of God towards fallen Man will manifestly appear, if we consider his sinful and miserable State after the Fall. For when Man had transgressed the Law of his Maker, and involved himself and his Posterity in Guilt and Perdition, there was nothing in him to incline God to shew him any Mercy, but what must at the same Time provoke his Justice, nothing that could move his Pity and Compassion, but the woeful Effects of his Presumption and Folly, or the Thoughts of his present Misery and future Destruction, which, without the Interposition of the Divine Clemency, had

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been endless and unavoidable. His Case, considered in itself, was as dark and dismal, as forlorn and desperate, as that of the fallen Angels. There was no Hope, no Remedy, no Pardon, no Salvation, but what must proceed freely, directly, and immediately from that very God, who had been so highly offended, from that Supreme Lord and Lawgiver, whose Laws had been violated and broken, from that Righteous Judge, whose Threatenings and Authority had been so shamefully despised and trampled upon. It was therefore a great Mercy in God to spare Man after he had sinned, and that he did not immediately take the Forfeiture of his Life, and inflict the Punishment due to his Transgression. It was still a greater Mercy to allow him the Advantage of second Thoughts, and to open for him a Way to escape the Danger and Misery he had brought himself into, to renew in him the Divine Image he had defaced, and to give him Power and Opportunity to recover himself, and regain, in some Measure, and by Degrees, that State of Holiness and Happiness, from which he was fallen. But, *Secondly*, The Crown and Perfection even of this redeeming Mercy, is the Means and Method,
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by which it was to be accomplished, *namely*, the Humiliation and Sufferings of the Son of God. God's Promise of a Redeemer in the Fulness of Time, and pursuant to his own free Motion and gracious Offer, his providing and accepting such a Mediator, as might condescend to the Vileness of Man, and at the same Time satisfy the Justice of God, is the highest Demonstration that could be given of the Divine Philanthropy, or of God's great Good-will towards the lapsed Race of Mankind; since God had nothing greater to give than his own Son. Had it been consistent with his Justice and Holiness, and the wise Ends of Government, to have pardoned Sin, without any Satisfaction made for the Violation of his righteous Laws; or had he actually designed to renew Sinners to Repentance, without demanding or insisting upon any Atonement for what was past; or had he been willing to admit them to Favour, and to restore them to their primitive State, without the Intercession of any Mediator, he would not have given so strong and full a Proof of his tender Love towards us, as he has now done by parting with his only-beloved Son out of his own Bosom, and sending him into the

World for the Redemption and Recovery of sinful Men. This is that great Mystery of Redeeming Love, that stupendous Contrivance of Divine Wisdom, which the very Angels desire to look into, and which it much more nearly concerns us to make the Subject of our frequent Meditation, Admiration, and Praise. But, *Thirdly*, To perfect and compleat this great Work, and that God might shew himself, as the Apostle here styles him, *A God of all Grace*, the inexhaustible Fountain of Grace and Goodness, he not only took Pity upon us in our distressed and forlorn Condition, when there was none beside to help or relieve us; he has not only provided a Ransom for us, and is ready to pardon us upon the Terms of Faith and Repentance, but designs to admit us to the Vision and Fruition of himself, to make us Gainers by our Fall, and to advance us to a higher Pitch of Perfection and Happiness by the second *Adam*, than we had forfeited and lost in the first, having *called us unto his eternal Glory by Christ Jesus*. If God had been only pleased to discharge us from the Guilt and Punishment, and to free us from the Power and Dominion of Sin, to deliver us from the Bondage and Tyranny of Satan,

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Satan, and to have restored us to our primitive State of Innocence and Happiness, and left us in the Possession of a terrestrial Paradise; this surely had been as much as we could, with any Shew of Reason or Modesty, have expected or desired for ourselves, and infinitely more than we could pretend to deserve. But this was not an equal Purchase for the amazing Condescension, the mighty Sufferings, and meritorious Obedience of our Ever-blessed Redeemer. This was not sufficient fully to demonstrate the exceeding Greatness of his Love towards us; this was not enough to answer the Ends of his great Undertaking for us, or to fill up the Measure of Redeeming Mercy. No; nothing less, it seems, could do this, than our Participation of the same Joy and Glory with himself, and free Admission into those heavenly Mansions he is gone before to prepare for us, that *where he is, there we may be also.* This he fully signified a little before his Passion, when he offered up this Prayer or Intercession, on this very Account and on our Behalf —
Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my Glory, which thou hast given me, the Glory which I had with thee before the World

was. Which Prayer of his we may look upon as effectually answered and granted by what *St. Peter* asserts in my Text, that *God hath called us unto his eternal Glory by Christ Jesus*; or, as it is expressed by *St. Paul*, — *Who hath delivered us from the Power of Darkneſs, and translated us into the Kingdom of his dear Son.* Now this is ſuch a ſuperlative and aſtoniſhing Inſtance of God's Loving-kindneſs towards Mankind, that nothing leſs than the actual Enjoyment of this great Felicity can qualify us for a right Apprehenſion of, and due Thankfulneſs to God for it. What his *eternal Glory* preciſely means, or fully imports, is more than we are at preſent able to explain or conceive. *Here we ſee through a Glaſs darkly, and know only in part*, but a very little Part; and our Affections and Gratitude can riſe no higher than our Belief or Apprehenſion is. But when we come to the full Enjoyment of the Happineſs prepared for us, and are admitted to ſee God Face to Face, we ſhall then be all Transport and Exultation. We ſhall then be deeply ſenſible of our Obligations, and of the infinite Love and Goodneſs of God towards us. Our Hearts will then break out at our Lips, and our Lips overflow

flow with Praise and Thanksgiving. At present we know not all the Particulars whereof future Happiness will consist; but this one Particular we are fully assured of, that it will be *eternal*. And that one Word is enough to engage our Affections, to inflame our Desires, and to quicken our Endeavours after it. For to be completely happy both in Body and Soul, and to be infallibly sure of continuing so to endless Ages, through the vast unmeasurable Space of Eternity, is the Height, and Breadth, and Depth, and Length of all human Felicity, the very farthest Extent, the fullest Measure, and the utmost Possibility of Happiness. Our Nature is not *capable* of more, and God himself has not *more* to give. Now this most bountiful Promise and Proposal, is such a powerful and effectual Motive to saving Repentance and sincere Obedience, that no Man, who firmly believes it, and rightly considers it, will be able to withstand the Force of it. And the only Reason why it does not generally prevail, is because it is generally disregarded, or not so seriously laid to Heart, or so closely attended to, as it ought to be. But as the highest Degrees of Grace proceed from God; so all inferiour Degrees are
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from him likewise, who is the *God of all Grace*. As he has appointed the End, so he ordains the Means; and one as well as the other is the Effect of his Mercy and Bounty. If we truly repent us of our Sins, if we faithfully discharge our Duty, if we fulfill the Conditions required of us, we stand indebted for all this to the free Grace of God, who *worketh in us both to will and to do, of his good Pleasure*. Our very Dispositions and Opportunities for Grace, are from Grace. We could not at this Time have met together for the solemn Service of Almighty God, without a particular Act of his Favour and Indulgence; and whatever good Motions we feel within our Souls, at this or any other Time, tending to create in us a greater Hatred and Detestation of Sin, and a more earnest Desire and Longing after Virtue and Holiness; they are to be ascribed wholly to the Influences and Operations of his Blessed Spirit, *from whom all holy Desires, all good Counsels, and all just Works do proceed*. 'Tis he that inspires good Thoughts and Resolutions; and then promotes and finishes those Resolutions by bringing them to Action, distributing his Grace to every one severally as he will, in such Kinds and Degrees,

grees, in such Measures and Proportions, as he knows to be then most useful, necessary, and seasonable. But still there is something required on our Parts. We must not be wholly passive or unactive, but be ready to comply and co-operate with the Designs and Directions of the Holy Spirit, be careful to attend and improve his Motions, who waits to be gracious to us, and pay a due Regard to all the Means and Seasons of Grace, if we desire to be Partakers of Holiness here, or Happiness hereafter. And therefore as I have already considered the Author of our Virtue and Happiness, *the God of all Grace, who hath called us unto his eternal Glory by Christ Jesus*; so now I propose to consider the whole Duty and Progress of a Christian, as represented by the Apostle in the following Words: — *After you have suffered awhile, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.* Which Passage contains several material Points of useful Instruction, which may be considered in the following Manner. (1.) That Suffering is the common Lot of Christians; and (2.) That they are to be made perfect, or to arrive at a State of Perfection, by these three Steps or Gradations, 1. By being *established* against

against Defection and Apostacy; 2. By being *strengthened* against Fainting and Despondency; and 3. By being *settled* on the firm Foundation of *Faith, Hope, and Charity*. Of these briefly in their Order.

First, We may consider that *Suffering* is the common Lot of Christians. This is a Point which the Apostle takes for granted, and which he supposes those he writes to, to be sufficiently instructed in. His Epistle is general, directed not to private Christians or *particular Churches*, but to the Church *Catholic*, or Christians *in general*. These he acquaints, that after he had *suffered awhile*, they are to be made *perfect*. He makes it, you see, a common Case, and intimates as if none were to be exempted. Indeed Christianity was at first founded in Sufferings. Its Author was the Prince of Sufferings. Its Design is to purify the Souls of Men, and to prepare them for Glory thro' a Course of Sufferings. It's Precepts all tend the same Way, and oblige us to many voluntary Hardships and Severities: And the present State, which is a State of Discipline, Trial, and Combat, does necessarily subject all Christians to greater or lesser Degrees of Suffering, either on account
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of their own Sins, or for the Exercise of their Virtue, or for the sake of Religion. So that as the Condition of Man, *after the Fall*, was much Labour, and little Pleasure, according to that Sentence of God upon *Adam*——

In the Sweat of thy Face shalt thou eat Bread, till thou return to the Earth; so the Appointment of Christians to a State of Suffering seems to be as fixed and unalterable, according to the express Declaration of our Saviour and his Apostle——*In the World ye shall have Tribulation. And, we must through much Tribulation enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.*

If we engage in Religion with this View, and accept of it upon these Terms, and with these Incumbrances, we are in no great Danger of being surpris'd with whatever Trials or Calamities may befall ourselves, or the Church of *Christ*. But if we dream of nothing but Peace and Safety, in the midst of Dangers and Enemies, and aim at nothing but a State of Ease and Prosperity, in a Life beset on every side with Cares, Sorrows, and Perplexities: If we labour to reconcile our Hopes of Heaven, with a Course of Self-Indulgencies and sensual Gratifications, we may be sure, that whenever Troubles and Tribulations arise
because

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because of the Word, *by and by we shall be offended*, and rather than quit our vain Hopes of a temporal Felicity, shall be in Danger of renouncing the Faith, or falling from our own Stedfastness. 'Tis therefore necessary to have these Principles and Perswasions firmly rooted in our Minds, *namely*, that Christianity is a State of Warfare, Labour, and Suffering, which obliges its Professors to great Watchfulness, Humility, and Patience; that from the first Beginning, to the Time of finishing our Christian Course, we are engaged, more or less, in one continued Conflict with those great Enemies of our Peace and Happiness, the World, the Flesh, and the Devil; the Conquest of which must be a Work of Time and Pains; and lastly, that Distresses and Afflictions are often highly useful and requisite to rouse and invigorate our unactive Minds, to soften and dispose our Hearts for the Reception of Divine Grace, and to take off our Thoughts from the Things of this World, and to fix them on a better. Fortified with these Perswasions and Considerations, we shall be prepared to meet Trials and Temptations, to encounter Dangers and Difficulties, and, as the Apostle exhorts, to *endure Hardness as good*

good Soldiers of Jesus Christ; the only sure Way to Victory and Triumph, the Way that leads to solid Happiness and true Glory. But

Secondly, After we have suffered awhile, the Apostle prays, that we may be *made perfect*. And this Perfection, as he intimates, consists of three Particulars, which proceed gradually, or from one Degree of Perfection to another, till we come to a State of Maturity and Consummation in Virtue and Goodness. The *first* Step to Perfection, is to be *established* against Defection and Apostacy. This I call the *first* Step to *Perfection*, tho' 'tis not the first Step we are to take in our Christian Course. No, there are many wearisome Stages to be gone through, before we can be in a Condition or Capacity to aim or strive for Perfection. There are several Things, to which Nature has a violent Aversion, that must be undergone, several to which we are strongly inclined, that must be avoided, before we can make any Proficiency, or secure our Standing. To make this clear, we may consider the Christian Life, as the Scripture does, under the Notion of a *Race* and *Warfare*. In the former Case, a Man must be able to *stand*, before he can walk or run, or
be

be fit to contend for the Prize; and in the latter, he must *stand his Ground*, and face his Enemy, before he can be said to engage, or hope to obtain the Victory. If he has a secret Favour and Affection for the Party he ought to resist, and should endeavour to overcome, he will either decline fighting, or take an Opportunity to go over to them. And this is the Case of every Christian, who still retains a Kindness for his Sins, those deadly Enemies of his Soul, which he ought manfully to fight against, and to *resist even unto Blood*. And if he did so, he would then be able to maintain his Ground, to continue his Progress, and to go on to Perfection. But so long as he neglects his solemn Engagements *as a Christian*, in Favour to the general or particular Propensities of Nature, *which war against the Soul*; he is not in a Capacity to make any Proficiency in Virtue and Goodness, or to stand his Ground against Temptations. On the contrary, he exposes himself naked and defenceless to all the furious Assaults of the Adversary; and is so far from being *establish'd* in the right Way, or from being arrived to a State of Strength and Stability, that 'tis nothing but the particular Favour of an indulgent

dulgent Providence that keeps him from falling. And should God ever suffer him to be tempted or tried, as he deserves, he would soon be made sensible of his miserable Frailty, and be ready to acknowledge that his standing *before* was entirely owing, not to any Strength of *Virtue* or *habitual Goodness in himself*, but to the *free Grace* and *Mercy* of God, which alone could secure him in that State from Defection and Apostacy. What *St. Paul* complains of in *Demas*, would be the sad Fate of all lukewarm Christians, if they were brought to the Test and Trial, *Demas hath forsaken me*, saith the Apostle, *having loved this present World*. And an immoderate Love of present Good will incline any Person to *make Shipwreck of Faith and a good Conscience*. When the Things of this World and of the other come in Competition, and one or the other must be parted with, the careless and unsettled Christian, for the sake of the former, will make no Scruple to renounce his Interest in the latter. If therefore we would be Proof against so fearful and fatal a Choice; if we desire to be *made perfect*, or do really aim at a State of Perfection (and by this I understand no more, than to

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use the most proper and prudent and effectual Means to secure and advance our Virtue in this Life, and our Happiness in the next) we must labour in the first place to be *establish'd*, to be able to grapple with Trials and Temptations, that so we may no longer be carried about with every Blast of Vanity, or be driven from our Post by every Assault of the Enemy; but, as the Apostle speaks, *be able to withstand in the evil Day, and having done all, to stand*. This is the *first* Step to Christian Perfection. And then, 2. The next in Order is, that we be *strengthen'd* against Fainting and Despondency. The former supposes, that we keep our Post, and maintain our Fidelity; that we do not quit our Station, or desert our Charge. *This* supposes us to be active and laborious, not soon tired with Duty, or soon weary in well-doing; but that being *strengthen'd* with Might in the inner Man, we proceed with Vigour and Resolution in our Christian Course, encouraged thereto by the Example of our Leader and Guide, the Captain of our Salvation, and by the Promise of an exceeding great Reward. But as nothing but the Grace of God can *stablish* our Hearts, and fix and stay our wavering Minds, that

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that are naturally so very subject to Levity and Inconstancy, and confirm us in our holy Purposes; so 'tis the same free Grace, that must bring our good Designs into Action, give Success to our virtuous Undertakings, and enable us to go on after we have begun, and to *press towards the Mark for the Prize of the high Calling of God in Christ Jesus*. We can't *stop* in our Course, without endangering the Loss of all that we have gained before; and we can't *proceed*, without the pleasing Satisfaction of having so far secured the Conquests we have already obtained over the Enemies of our Souls; and the further we proceed, the more we shall be strengthen'd, and the nearer and surer Prospect we shall have both of finishing our Course, and of obtaining the Reward. We should therefore earnestly pray, as the Apostle does, for all Christians, that God would *stablish and strengthen* us, that he would keep us from falling and from fainting, from Apostacy and Despondency, and enable us to hold fast the Profession of our Faith without wavering. And this will bring us to the *third* and last Degree of *Christian Perfection*, that is taken notice of by St. Peter in the Text, which is to be

fixed and confirmed in a State of Piety and Goodness, or to be settled on the firm Foundation of *Faith*, *Hope*, and *Charity*. The Apostle indeed does not mention these Virtues, but they are necessarily implied, as some of the principal and essential Branches of Christian Perfection; without which we can neither be *stablish'd*, *strengthen'd*, or *settled*; without which we can neither begin, continue, nor finish our Course: But as a Ship floating on the wide Ocean, without Pilot or Compass, is tossed up and down to different and contrary Ways, and every Moment in Danger of being swallowed up of foaming Waves, or dashed against the Rocks; so is every one that passes through the Waves of this troublesome World, without *Faith* to guide and direct him to the Haven where he would be; without *Hope* to enliven and encourage him to proceed in his Voyage; and without *Charity* to lighten the Burden, and to sweeten the bitter and more disagreeable Parts of human Life. The Apostle tells us, that *the End of the Commandment is Charity*; and if *Charity* be the *End*, *Faith* must be the *Beginning* of a religious Life; and then *Hope* will come in between to lighten our Steps,

Steps, and bring us within View of the promised Reward. And these are the main Springs of all human Actions, both in regard of the great Concerns of the other World, and with respect likewise to the Things of this Life: For the Attainment of which, Men would never labour, if they did not *believe* they were attainable by Industry and Care, if they did not *hope* to succeed in their Undertakings, and to be rewarded for their Pains, and if they did not *love* and *desire* the Things they labour for. And if they were but acted by something of the same Belief, Expectation, and Desire, in the Pursuit of heavenly Things, their pious Labours would then be more constant and uninterrupted, their general Conduct more regular and uniform, and their Endeavours after Virtue and Happiness more prosperous and successful. Whereas now, for Want of these lively Principles, or a due and frequent Exercise of them, they go on but heavily and slowly in the Ways of Religion. They serve God, but 'tis with Uneasiness and Reluctance; they remember their Saviour, but 'tis with Coldness and Indifference; they don't care wholly to neglect their Duty, but they don't perform

it as they may and ought. But this is not the Way to Perfection : This is not sufficient to make them stedfast and unmoveable, and always abounding in the Work of the Lord, or to secure them from Defection and Despondency in perilous Times : If we would escape the Contagion of such Times, and consult the Health and Welfare of our Souls ; if we desire to hold fast our Integrity, and to finish our Course with Joy, we must endeavour all we can to strengthen our Faith, to increase our Hope, and to exalt our Charity, that is, our Love of God and Goodness. But this we are not able to do of ourselves, and therefore we should, as *St. Peter* directs us, be continually imploring the Aid and Assistance of God's Holy Spirit ; which is absolutely necessary to our Improvement in Virtue and Holiness, to give Success to our Labours, and to secure our Stedfastness in the Faith. And this is what *St. Paul* more particularly inculcates and earnestly presses upon us : For having recommended to our Use the *whole Armour of God*, and distinctly mention'd each Part of this spiritual Armour—
The Girdle of Truth, the Breast-plate of Righteousness, the Sandals of Peace, the Shield
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of Faith, the Helmet of Salvation, and the Sword of the Spirit ; he adds moreover this general Exhortation—Praying always with all Prayer and Supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all Perseverance. I conclude therefore with the same Apostle's earnest Supplication for the Thessalonians—Now our Lord Jesus Christ, and God even our Father, which hath loved us, and given us everlasting Consolation and good Hope through Grace, comfort your Hearts, and stablish you in every good Word and Work.

Now to God the FATHER, SON, and HOLY GHOST, three Persons, and one God, be Glory and Dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

SERMON VIII.

Some necessary Principles of a religious Life, and the Obligation of Christians to abound in the same.

2 THESS. IV. I.

Furthermore then we beseech you, Brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more.

THE Apostles, after they had laboured more abundantly in propagating the Gospel, and in converting great Numbers both of *Jews* and *Gentiles* to Christianity, and had likewise planted Churches in several Places, thought it incumbent on them
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afterwards either to visit their new Converts in Person, or to send some Persons of Note to comfort and confirm them, or to give them some proper and seasonable Instructions, in order to settle and establish them in the Christian Doctrine and Practice, to arm and secure them against the Danger of Defection and Apostacy, and to encourage their Proficiency and Perseverance. They did not think it enough to have been instrumental in turning them *from Darknes to Light, and from the Power of Satan unto God*, unless they proceeded in carrying on the great Work they had by the Blessing of God so prosperously begun, unless they used their farther Endeavours to promote and set forward the Salvation of those they had converted, and laboured to defend and secure them against the poisonous Influence of those false Doctrines, Errors, and Heresies, which began very early to infest and disturb the Church of *Christ*. The laying a Foundation, and making a good Beginning, is indeed one Half of a Christian's Work: But unless we go on after we have begun, and take care to build upon the Foundation which we have laid, we shall lose all the Labour we had taken, and at last fall short of the Reward.

ward. On the other hand, great Care is necessary to make the Foundation sure and firm, that it do not rest upon a sandy Bottom, upon the fallible Judgments and uncertain Opinions of private Men, but proceed upon the unerring Word of God, and stand fixt upon that immoveable Rock, *viz.* the Doctrine of *Christ*: *For other Foundation can no Man lay*, says the Apostle, *than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ*. If we venture to build upon any other Foundation, the Structure of an holy Life and virtuous Conversation, the higher we may seem to build, the greater at last will be the Fall. For without a true and lively Faith in *Christ*, we can never be assured of God's Acceptance, or be able to stand our Ground, or maintain our Virtue in a Day of Trial. A Christian Practice can proceed from nothing but Christian Principles; and a Title to Happiness or Salvation, is no otherwise to be secured, than by complying with the gracious Terms of the New Covenant. Our first Care therefore should be to make sure of the Foundation, and our next to build upon it; and then, lastly, we must labour all we can to finish and complete it. In other Words, we must know and understand our Duty, before

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fore we can practise it, and we must *abound more and more* in the Practice of it, before we shall be able to finish it, or to bring it to that Degree of Perfection, which God has promised to accept and reward. St. Paul in the Words of my Text takes exprefs Notice only of the two former, and leaves the *Thessalonians* to infer the last. — *Furthermore then we beseech you, Brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more.* In which Words you may observe, in the *first* Place, St. Paul's manner of Address to the *Thessalonians*, which was by Way of Exhortation and in the Name of *Christ* — *We beseech you, Brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus*; *Secondly*, Their being taught by the Apostle the general Doctrines of Christianity in relation to Practice, or *how they ought to walk and to please God*; and, *Thirdly*, His earnest Exhortation to them, to improve what they had received, to make a farther Progress, and to *abound more and more*. These Particulars I shall first consider and explain, and then conclude with a seasonable and serious Exhortation.

First,

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First then I observe, that St. Paul's Address to the *Thessalonians* is affectionate and earnest, by Way of Exhortation, and in the Name of *Christ*. — *We beseech you, Brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus.* The Apostles in general, and St. Paul in particular, take care to let their Hearers or Converts understand, that what they delivered to them was not in their own Name, but in the Name of *Christ*; that they did not pretend themselves to have any Dominion over their Faith, but only to be Helpers of their Joy; that tho' Necessity was laid upon them to preach the Gospel unto them, yet that they did it according to the Power which the Lord had given them, *to Edification and not to Destruction*; that tho' they might with much Authority injoin them that which was convenient, yet for Love-sake, and out of Tendernefs and Compassion, they chose rather to intreat, to exhort, and to invite them to a Love and Practice of their Duty: Ascribing nothing to themselves, and leaving the Success wholly to God; declaring, that they are only his Ministers and Instruments in his Hands, and can effect nothing by themselves; that they act by a Power derived from him, and as Ambassadors of *Christ*, and there-

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therefore pray them in *Christ's* stead to be reconciled to God. Never using Sharpness or Severity, but when the Urgency or the Importance of the Occasion required it, and gentle Methods had been tried in vain. At other Times they used great Plainness of Speech, and much Intreaty with them, that their *Faith might not stand in the Wisdom of Men, but in the Power of God.* And tho' they would not, for the Pleasure of any, act contrary to their Commission, or teach otherwise than they were commanded, yet in all lawful or indifferent Things they left them to the Use of their Christian Liberty, only desiring to have the Use or Forbearance of the same Liberty themselves. And by this Means the Word of God had free Course, and generally found an easy Access to the Hearts of Men. For they could not but plainly perceive, that the Preachers of the Gospel then delivered the Messages of Heaven, and spake forth the Words of Truth and Soberness, that they evidently consulted the Good of their Hearers, and laboured and desired nothing more than to be instrumental in securing their Stedfastness and promoting their Salvation; and this procured them a willing Attention, a due Submission to their Authority, and a ready Compliance with
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their Admonitions, Intreaties, and Exhortations. And the Reasonableness of this will appear, if we consider, in the

Second Place, some of the more general Doctrines that were taught and delivered by the Apostles, as the Ground and Foundation of all Christian Practice; among which (to omit what has been treated of in former Discourses) those that I propose to consider at present, shall be principally these three. 1. The Knowledge of God; 2. A Respect to him in whatever we do; and, 3. The having Respect unto the Recompence of the Reward. *First*, The Knowledge we have, or can have of God, is and must be derived to us from that Fountain of Knowledge, the Light of *Revelation*, or by what we are taught from *Moses* and the Prophets, and from *Christ* and his Apostles, in the Sacred Writings of the Old and New Testament. By the Light of Nature Men were able to prove the Existence and Unity of God, and to discover something of his Nature and Attributes. But this was only as *through a Glass darkly*, in Comparison of those brighter Discoveries we now enjoy by Means of a Divine Revelation. The wisest Men among the *Heathens* were often puzzled and perplexed in

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in Things relating to God, which every Christian is now, in a great Measure, made capable of understanding, according as it is written, *they shall be all taught of God; for all shall know me from the least of them to the greatest of them.* Nor did the wiser Heathens know only in part, but a very small Part of what has since been made known to the Christian World, but that Knowledge of God, which they had, with much Labour and Study, attained unto, was mixed and blended with a great deal of Error. The Difference between them and Christians in this respect, may be resembled to the Difference observable between the Discourses of holy *Job*, and the Discourses of *Eliphaz*, *Zophar*, and *Bildad*. For tho' these latter had some right Apprehensions and noble Thoughts, and spoke many excellent Things concerning the Divine Being and his Works of Creation, yet 'tis plain that they entertained at the same Time some gross Notions and very wrong Conceptions in relation to his providential Government of the World, or his Conduct and Administration in human Affairs. Then as to common Heathens, these were so shamefully ignorant of the true God, of his Nature and Perfections, that

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as they believed a Multiplicity of Deities, so they served and worshipped they knew not what, *changed the Glory of the incorruptible God into an Image made like unto corruptible Man*; and therefore as the Apostle farther observes, *since the World by Wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the Foolishness of Preaching to save them that believe.* By the preaching of the Gospel, the true God was made known to the World, his Attributes clearly and distinctly revealed, the Counsels of his Will and his eternal Purposes, that had been hid from Ages and from Generations, were manifested and brought to Light, and his Care and Concern for Mankind was fully display'd. In the Writings of the Apostles we have all the Proofs and Discoveries of this Kind that can be reasonably desired for our Instruction, Comfort, and Satisfaction. There we may learn what God is in himself, and what he has done and is still doing for us. And the Knowledge of this is the Foundation of all Obedience. But without the Knowledge of God, (which is so fully laid open, and so earnestly recommended and enforced by the sacred Writers) we can neither fear, nor love, nor obey him, as we ought. For how can we *fear* a Being,
that

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that we are Strangers to and unacquainted with? How can we dread his Anger, if we don't know and consider his Almighty Power? How can we be afraid to offend him, if we don't understand what 'tis to obtain, or what to forfeit his Favour? And then much less can we be said to *love* God, if we don't know him: For tho' he be infinitely amiable, and the supreme Object of Love, he is so only to those who have right Notions of his Divine Attributes and Dispensations. *We love him,* says the Apostle, *because he first loved us.* Our Knowledge therefore of his Love to us must be the Cause and Motive of our Love to him. And then farther 'tis certain, that we can't *serve* and *obey* him, as we ought to do, without being endued with a competent and saving Knowledge of him. For *he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek him.* We read in the seventeenth Chapter of the second Book of *Kings*, that when *Senacherib* had taken *Samaria*, and carried away Captive the ten Tribes of *Israel*, *He sent Men from Babylon and placed them in the Cities of Samaria, instead of the Children of Israel.* And so it was at the Beginning of their dwell-

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*ing there, that they feared not the Lord. Therefore the Lord sent Lions among them, which slew some of them. Wherefore they spoke to the King of Assyria, saying, The Nations which thou hast removed and placed in the Cities of Samaria, know not the Manner of the God of the Land. Therefore he hath sent Lions among them, and behold, they slay them, because they know not the Manner of the God of the Land. Then the King of Assyria commanded, saying, Carry thither one of the Priests, whom ye brought from thence, and let him go, and dwell there, and let him teach them the Manner of the God of the Land. After which 'tis said, that they feared the Lord. From this Instance then we plainly see, that as God is provoked by a Neglect of his Service; so there is no fearing or serving him, without knowing *who* and *what* he is, and without being acquainted with the Way and Manner of his Service. If therefore we desire to know *how to walk and to please God*, we must search the Scriptures and be conversant in the Writings of the Apostles, which will clearly and fully inform us, what God is in himself, and what he is with respect to us, *namely*, that he is a glorious Spirit, of infinite Purity*

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Purity and Perfection, that was from Everlasting without Beginning, and will be to Everlasting without End: That he is the Creator of all Things, the Redeemer of Mankind, the Sanctifier of his faithful People; Three in Person, and One in Essence, *over all God blessed for ever*: That he is subject to no Passion or Perturbation, that *with him is no Variableness nor Shadow of turning*; being always the same, perfectly Holy and perfectly Happy: That he is no bodily Substance, such as our Eyes may behold, but spiritual and invisible, *whom no Man hath seen, or can see*: That he is infinitely Great and Excellent, beyond all that we can possibly conceive or imagine; that he filleth all Places and is contain'd in none: That he is the Fountain of Light, the Author and Giver of every Thing that is Good, and the sole Dispenser of all Happiness: That he has received his Being from none, and gives Being to all other Things: In a word, that he is of infinite Power and Majesty, Wisdom and Justice, Truth and Faithfulness, Mercy and Goodness; that he knows all Things, is the only Searcher of Hearts, the Disposer of all Events, and in whose Hands are all the Powers of eternal Happiness and Misery. Now these great Truths, if we duly

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attend to, firmly believe, and seriously consider, we shall then be sensible what Obligations we are under to serve our Creator, or *how we ought to walk and to please God.* Especially if, in the *second* Place, we have a due Respect unto him in the Duties we are to perform. And this is highly necessary upon several Accounts, but chiefly for these two Reasons, 1. In order to make us perform our Duty aright; and, 2. To render the Performance of it acceptable to God. 1. Then, we can't perform our Duty, as we ought to do, without having an Eye to God in what we perform. A general Intention to please God, is the indispensable Duty of every Christian; without this, we can do nothing as we ought, and shall be able to please neither God nor ourselves. This general Intention then is requisite in all Instances of Duty; but there are some Instances in which this general Intention must be *present* and *actual*; that is, we must *actually* design, resolve, and endeavour to the best of our Power to please God in what we are going about. In such Cases we are to consider God as our Lord and Master, who has a Right to command us whatever he pleases, but *withal* is so good and gracious a Master that he commands

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mands us nothing but what is fit and reasonable in itself, and highly conducing to our own Benefit and Advantage: To consider him likewise as our Lawgiver and Judge, who has Power to punish us for every Neglect or Disobedience, and has promised to reward our Diligence and Faithfulness: To consider that we are never absent from him, and never out of his Sight; that he is as well acquainted with our Thoughts and Intentions, as with our outward Actions; that he knows the very Bent of our Hearts and every Inclination of our Souls, and regards the Performance of our Duty no otherwise than as 'tis the Fruit of a sincere and upright Intention. Without some such Considerations as these, we can't discharge any one Duty as we ought. *God is a Spirit*; and they that serve and obey him must serve and obey him *in Spirit and in Truth*. We are therefore to look unto him, both for Acceptance and Reward; and the more fixt and intent our Eye is upon him, the more regular and uniform, the more cautious and circumspect shall we be in all our Conduct and Conversation. Nor is this *having a Respect unto God in what we do*, less necessary in order to render our Performances

acceptable to him, than to make us perform our Duty aright. This indeed is what has been hinted already; but 'tis a Matter of so great Importance, that we can't too seriously or too frequently consider it. For our whole Dependance is upon God's Acceptance of what we do. Without which, all our Labour is and must be vain, and not only so, but we are answerable for our Mispendence and Abuse of it. So that if we don't please God, we are sure to provoke him, and instead of discharging a Duty, we commit a Sin. But if we aim and study to please him; if this be our real Design and Intent, we shall not fail then of attaining our End, in some good Measure. Our weakest and poorest Performances will meet with a favourable Reception, when they are the best we have to offer, and come recommended by Sincerity. If our Heart be right with God, careful to please, and fearful to offend him, we can't bring him a more grateful Offering. And this we shall be enabled to do, if we have always a particular Eye and Respect unto him in the Duties he requires of us. For this will awe us into Obedience, and powerfully incline us to use our best Endeavours to discharge every Duty
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in such a manner, as, through the Merits and Intercession of our Blessed Redeemer, will be graciously accepted, and entitle us to a Reward. And this, *thirdly*, is another general Doctrine very much tending to Christian Practice, *namely*, the *having Respect to the Recompence of the Reward*. If Christians could once prevail with themselves to take off their Minds from the vain and fading Things of this Life, and carry their Thoughts and Views into Futurity; were they able, in this mortal State, to behold those bright Crowns of Glory that are prepared for those that love and fear God; or could they supply the present Defect of Vision by a raised and lively Faith, and frequent and serious Thoughts and Desires of the heavenly State; they would then mend their Pace in Religion, and labour more earnestly to finish their Christian Course. They would then go on with Vigour and Resolution, with Sprightliness and Alacrity, and think nothing too much to obtain and secure a blissful Immortality. To such as these *Christ's Yoke* would be *easy* indeed, and his *Burden light*. Yea, his very Cross would appear then not only tolerable, but almost desirable. 'Tis the Want of such a lively

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Prospect and such entertaining Thoughts, that makes us ready to droop and faint upon every little trying Occasion, and so soon to grow weary of well-doing; that makes us startle at every Appearance of Danger, and so apt to sink and give way at the very Approach of Difficulty and Opposition. What was it enabled the Saints of Old to undergo such grievous Trials, and to encounter such formidable Evils as they did, but a lively Faith in the Promises of God, and the Hope and Assurance of a glorious Recompence? 'Tis true, we are not sufficient of ourselves to think any such Things as of ourselves. 'Tis not in our own Power to take off our Minds so fully and effectually from the Cares and Pleasures and Incumbrances of this Life, as to fix them on Things above. Our best Endeavours will not enable us so to command and controul our own Hearts, as to make them always approve the Things that are more excellent, to make them constantly choose, desire, and seek after those that are most durable and delightful. But what is wanting in us will be supplied by God, if we be sensible of our Want, and desirous of a Supply from him. He, and he only can raise those Affections

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fections up to Heaven, which have a strong Tendency to fasten down our Souls to mere worldly Comforts and sensual Satisfactions. If then he sees us sincerely labouring and endeavouring after an heavenly Disposition, and willing and desirous to know beforehand something of the Blessedness we are called to inherit, he will give us sometimes a small Glimpse and Prospect of future Glory, and make us, in some low Degree, taste and relish those heavenly Joys, which we are, in the fullest Measure, to partake of hereafter. There is no good Christian but, one Time or other, may feel and experience in himself something of this spiritual Relish and Satisfaction, and a more eager Longing and Expectation of future Happiness, than he usually has at other Times. The *Vigour* and *Liveliness* of the Impression will indeed soon wear off; but the *Remembrance* of it should continue with us, and quicken and excite us to a Readiness and Chearfulness in our Duty: And when the Soul is indisposed for heavenly Contemplations, or hindered and diverted by worldly Cares and Avocations, yet still we ought to carry in our Minds a *general* Respect to the Recompence of Reward, and make this the
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main Point to which we steer and direct all our Actions. And this alone would help us to overcome many Difficulties, and to perform our Duty with more Care and Exactness. The Consideration of the *Greatness* of the Reward would make us despise little Troubles, and more willingly submit to those that are greater. The Thoughts of its *endless* Duration would make us esteem the Afflictions of this Life as light and momentary in Comparison. The Hope and Prospect of a *Crown of Glory* would reconcile us to Contempt and Ignominy, and be a Means to remove every thing that might hinder or obstruct us in our Way to Heaven and Happiness. And the comfortable Expectation or frequent Remembrance of a perfect Deliverance from all that is grievous and troublesome, and of being admitted to the full Enjoyment of all that is happy and desirable, would strongly dispose us to be contented and easy under the necessary Inconveniencies and unavoidable Incumbrances of our present State. And why should we not take the readiest Course, and the likeliest Way, to render our Duty practicable and easy? And nothing can render it more so, than serious and frequent Considerations of the

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the promised Reward ; which would enable us, by Degrees, as the Psalmist speaks, even to *run the Way of God's Commandments*, and to finish our Christian Course with Safety and Delight. By this Method indeed, our Labour would not be *less*, but it would be *better* and more chearfully performed. Our Journey would not be *shorter*, but it would be finished with more Satisfaction and greater Security. For while we have Respect unto the Recompence of Reward, and keep in our View the eternal Weight of Glory, we shall neither loiter away our Time, nor labour in vain ; but forgetting those Things that are past, and reaching forth to those that are to come, we shall be enabled thereby to prosecute our Endeavours with Care and Constancy, and *use all Diligence to make our Calling and Election sure*. Having thus shewn *how we ought to walk and to please God*, and considered some of the principal Doctrines taught and urged by the Apostles to this Purpose, I come now to the

Third and last general Head of Discourse, which is St. Paul's earnest Exhortation to the *Thessalonians* to make a farther Progress, or to *abound more and more*. And as this will
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appear highly reasonable on account of what has been said before, *namely*, that we can't do too much to obtain the promised Reward; so is it necessary likewise, in order to secure both our past Labours, and our future Perseverance, to insure the Recompence for what we have done, and to facilitate the Performance of all the rest of our Duty. This is what St. *John* plainly intimates by those Words in his second Epistle — *Look to yourselves, that we lose not those Things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full Reward.* Those Precepts therefore in Scripture, to go on to Perfection, to grow in Grace, to be always abounding in the Work of the Lord, and to abound more and more, and the like, are to be consider'd not so much under the Notion of new and distinct Precepts, as of Fences, Guards, and Securities for the Discharge of all the rest. For the more Good any one does, the greater Inclination he will have to do more. A Progress in Virtue and Piety will increase the Habit, and render Duty more and more easy and natural to us. But if we neglect to go forward, or presume to stand still, we shall presently lose Ground, and soon bring upon ourselves a Listlessness, Averse-

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Averseness, and Indisposedness to any farther Proficiency and Improvement; which, beside the endangering our Perseverance, must increase our Work, as well as lessen our Ability to perform it. For 'twill cost us abundantly more Pains to recover what we have lost in the Way of Duty, than to proceed and go forward in a strait and regular Course of Obedience: So that to *abound more and more* in Righteousness and Goodness, is not only the most pious and religious, but the most prudent and effectual Method we can take to secure our Stedfastness and Salvation, and to render our Toils light and few in Comparison. I say, *light and few in Comparison*; for to be wholly free and exempt from Toil and Trouble, is neither consistent with our present State, nor with the Terms of the Covenant we are engaged in, nor with the Nature of Virtue, nor with the Hopes of a Reward. For nothing is virtuous, nothing rewardable, but what is attained by Care and Labour, and afterwards cherished by Watchfulness and Prayer. Our Virtues must be improved by the same Means by which they were acquired, *viz.* the Concurrence of the Divine Influence and Blessing, with our own Industry and Appli-

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Application. This our Blessed Saviour has given us a plain and lively Representation of in the fifteenth Chapter of *St. John*, by comparing himself to a *Vine*, and his Disciples to the *Branches*, and shewing that one without the other are not only unfruitful, but wither and die. *I am the Vine*, says he, *ye are the Branches*. *He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much Fruit; for without me ye can do nothing*. Again, *I am the true Vine, and my Father is the Husbandman*. *Every Branch in me, that beareth not Fruit, he taketh away; And every Branch, that beareth Fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more Fruit*. From all which we may observe, that as 'tis necessary not only for the Branches to continue in the Vine, in order to bring forth Fruit, but that those which *do* bear Fruit should be cultivated and pruned, that they may still become more fruitful; so Christians are to take care, not only to continue in the Communion of *Christ's Church*, and in the outward Profession of Christianity, and in the Performance of ordinary Christian Duties, but likewise that they sometimes purge and purify themselves, or submit to the necessary Purgations
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of the Divine Husbandman, that so they may abound in good Works, and that God thereby may be glorified.

I have now finished what I designed to speak to, and shall conclude with a Word or two of serious Exhortation. Let us then consider, that as Happiness is not to be attained without Virtue and Holiness; so neither can we maintain our Virtue, without making a farther Progress and gradual Improvements. There is no standing still in the Way of Religion: If we don't go forward, we shall go backward, and create to ourselves new Difficulties and Troubles, which we might avoid. Let us then arm ourselves with Patience, and go on with Resolution; and then the Captain of our Salvation will not only go before us, but lead us on. The Blessed Spirit will guide and assist us; the Holy Angels will be ready to succour and defend us here, and to conduct us to the Mansions of Bliss hereafter. A Crown of Blessedness will await us in the other World. Every Step we take, and every Point we gain, will be a fresh Motive to proceed, and bring us nearer to the End of our Course. Victory and Triumph will be the sure Consequence of faithful Diligence
and

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and a steady Perseverance; and the more
Pains we take, the greater will be our Reward.
If then these are the Motives and Encourage-
ments to *abound more and more*, what is
there that can or should hinder us from pro-
ceeding, or what Excuse can we offer for
ourselves, *if we neglect so great Salvation?*
We may be assured, that all the World can't
do us so great a Mischief, as our own Neg-
lect in this Case would bring upon us. But
if we are diligent and industrious in our
Christian Calling, if we mind and pursue
the one Thing needful with Care and Con-
stancy, we shall not be left destitute of Sup-
port and Comfort in our Way, nor miss of
Happiness at our Journey's End.

*Now to God the FATHER, God the SON,
and God the HOLY GHOST, be ascribed,
as is most due, all Honour and Glory,
Dominion and Praise, now and for ever.
Amen.*

SER-

SERMON IX.

The Nature, Measures, and principal Parts of Christian Perfection, briefly stated and explained.

2 COR. xiii. 11.

Finally, Brethren, farewell: Be perfect, be of good Comfort, be of one Mind, live in Peace; and the God of Love and Peace shall be with you.

AS St. Paul concludes this Second Epistle of his to the *Corinthians* with a solemn Benediction; so he takes his Leave of them in a serious, tender, and pathetick Exhortation. As in the former he pronounces upon them all the Blessings and Mercies that proceed from the Fountain of

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all Grace and Goodness; so in this he advises them to the right Method to obtain and secure those invaluable Benefits. He had been compell'd to use some Sharpness of Speech towards them; but now he changes his Stile, softens what he had said, and turns his Re-proof into Exhortation, assuring them at the same time, that if they will follow his Advice, they shall not be destitute of the Blessings he prays for; if they will be careful to cherish and maintain mutual Love and Peace amongst themselves, *the God of Love and Peace shall be with them.* And surely the Apostle could not take a readier or more likely Way to convince and persuade them of his sincere and earnest Desire to promote and set forward their Salvation, and of his making use of the Power which God had given him *to Edification and not to Destruction*: That his seeming Severity was intended for their Good, and that he wished nothing more than their Perfection. They had before neglected his Orders, disobeyed his Injunctions, and slighted and disputed his Authority: And tho' he had been constrained, upon this Account, to treat them with something of Rigour, yet he plainly shews, that his only Design in all this was
to

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to recover them from the Errors they had fallen into, to secure their Stedfastness for the future, and to prevent their being led aside by specious Delusions, and the cunning Craftiness of those that lay in wait to deceive. And having thus endeavoured to remove their Prejudice, to settle them in the right Faith, to regulate their Practice, and to confirm and establish his own Authority amongst them, he gives them his final Salutation and Direction in these Words — *Finally, Brethren, farewell: Be perfect, be of good Comfort, be of one Mind, live in Peace; and the God of Love and Peace shall be with you.* In which Words the Apostle gently reminds them of their past and present Defects, at the same time that he excites them to a farther Progress and Perseverance in Goodness. By exhorting them to be *perfect*, he puts them in mind of their Deficiencies both in point of Faith and Practice, as they had little or no Belief of the great Article of the Resurrection, and had been guilty of great Abuse in the Celebration of the Lord's Supper. By persuading them to *be of good Comfort*, he farther endeavours to remove the Trouble and Sorrow, which his former Epistle had given

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them.

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them. By directing them to *be of one Mind* and to *live in Peace*, he calls to their Remembrance the Divisions and Disorders, the Factions and Parties they had run into, by holding Men's Persons in Admiration, and preferring one Teacher before another; one fatal Consequence of which was, that some at last would have no Teachers at all. But these are Particulars that concern and relate to the *Corinthians*. The Words of my Text are general, and intended for the common Use and Benefit of all Christians: And we may observe, that in this short Exhortation are contained all the chief Parts or Branches of the Christian Life. (1.) *Perfection* in the Way of Duty, *Be perfect*. (2.) *Joy and Consolation*, which are the Fruit and Effect of such Perfection, *Be of good Comfort*. (3.) *Unanimity* in Point of Doctrine, *Be of one Mind*. (4.) *Mutual Agreement* with regard to Practice, *Live in Peace*; to which is subjoined, in the *last* Place, the Promise of a Blessing upon such sincere Endeavours and Christian Deportment, *And the God of Love and Peace shall be with you*. These I shall consider in the Order in which they lie. And,

First,

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First, We are exhorted to aim and labour after Perfection in the Way of Duty, *Be perfect*; that is, we are to leave nothing undone that we know to be generally necessary to Salvation. Our Duty indeed is of very large Extent, and *the Commandments of God*, as the Psalmist says, *are exceeding broad*; not only with respect to the *Number*, but as to the *Fulness* and *Comprehensiveness* of them, as requiring the utmost Purity and Perfection that is attainable by human Nature, with the Assistance of Divine Grace. And the Thoughts of this, or the Despair of fulfilling the whole Law in this manner, might be one Reason of that common Practice of the *Jews* in our Saviour's Time, of chusing and selecting one particular Duty or Precept, by the strict Observance of which they hoped to atone and make amends for their Omissions and Defects in other Points. This was the Occasion of that Question they put to our Saviour — *Which is the great Commandment in the Law?* And his Answer to this Question seems extremely well suited and adapted to this Notion of theirs, and tended to cure them of such partial Obedience, as directing them to the Observance of one particular Command-

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ment,

ment, *the Love of God*, which would necessarily oblige and draw them on to the Observance of all the rest. But their lame and imperfect Obedience was the more blameable, in that they generally singled out for their stricter Observance some one Precept not of the *moral* but of the *ceremonial* Law, of less Value in itself and less acceptable in the Sight of God ; which made them such rigid Observers of the ceremonial Part of the Sabbath, that they were some of them so absurd as to imagine, that Works of Mercy and Charity, and our Saviour's healing the Sick, and performing other miraculous Cures on that Day, were Breaches and Violations of the Sabbath. But all this, I say, seems to have been owing, in a great Measure, to a prevailing Notion of the utter Impossibility of keeping all the Commandments of God, or fulfilling the whole Law in its utmost Extent. But we are to consider, that Perfection is attainable not all at once, but only by Degrees ; and consequently that our Performance of Duty must, for some time, be more or less imperfect, or less perfect at first, than it will be afterwards. 'Tis Practice and Custom that must bring us on gradually to greater Perfection. In the mean while,

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while, if we bring with us a willing Mind, and use our sincere Endeavours, it will be accepted according to that which we have, and not according to that we have not. And here the Distinction that ought to be observed between Precepts and Prohibitions may be of great Use and Service to us in this Case. For what are called *negative* Precepts, oblige us at all Times, that is, we are altogether and at all Times to abstain from that which is forbidden. But this does not hold with respect to *positive* Precepts. These do not oblige us always, nor are we to perform some Duties, but at certain and proper Seasons : Nor are some of the Duties that belong to those Seasons so strictly and indispensably necessary, but that they may be omitted or exchanged for some others that may be more seasonable and requisite at such Times. God himself has determined this Point, by declaring — *I will have Mercy and not Sacrifice.* By which he intimates, that he is ready to dispense sometimes with Duties more immediately relating to himself, when the Needs or Necessities of our Fellow-Christians require our Assistance and Attendance. And as this chiefly respects the *publick* Offices of Religion, so *private* Duties

likewise may sometimes be changed for one another. If we are indisposed for one, we may have recourse to another. Nor is such a Change any Detriment or Hindrance to our spiritual Improvement; but rather a prudent Method of discharging the several Parts of our Duty to the best Advantage. Besides, the different Stages or Seasons of our Life require a Difference and Distinction in our Observance of the Divine Commands. Some call for a solemn and more than ordinary Repentance; others for a more vigorous Faith and Trust in God; some for the Exercise of Patience, some for the Practice of Piety, and others again for the Performance of Mercy and Charity. Our only Study and Concern, in this respect, should be, to take care, that some Way or other we be always usefully employ'd; which is the true and right Way to Perfection. These Things considered, the Commandments of God will be found to be not so grievous or burdensome, as they are commonly thought; since the Perfection required is only gradual and progressive, or such as is to be attained by leisurely Steps and Degrees. And the Commandments of God may, in their several Turns, or one after another, be all duly and regu-

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regularly performed, at different Times, and on proper Occasions. So that allowing only different Degrees of Perfection, and different Times and Seasons for the Performance of Duty, we shall find that the Perfection required of us by God, is neither impracticable, nor unreasonable. Let us not then with *Solomon's* Sluggard fancy there is *a Lion in the Way*, and thereby be deterred from prosecuting our Journey, or entering upon our Christian Race. 'Tis our own Fault now, if we fall short of Christian Perfection, or such Perfection as the Gospel recommends to us. By our own sincere Endeavours, by a gradual Improvement, and by the Help of Divine Grace, we may be *perfect so far*, as to be able, in some good Measure, to perform all the greater and weightier Matters of the Law; and whatever of Perfection is wanting beside, will be supplied and made up to us, by the most perfect Righteousness and Obedience of our Saviour *Christ*. And as this is no small Comfort and Encouragement to us under the Sense we have at any Time of our own great Defects and Imperfections, so we shall be farther excited and encouraged to go on to Perfection, if we consider,

Secondly,

Secondly, The Joy and Consolation that is the natural Result and Consequence of it — *Be perfect, be of good Comfort.* And one necessarily follows the other. For what should hinder that Man from enjoying himself with Comfort and Satisfaction, who is happily busied in answering the End of his Creation, and in attaining the End of his Hope, even the Salvation of his Soul? The nearer we approach to a State of Perfection, the farther we are removed from a State of Trouble and Uneasiness. Inordinate Desires, unruly Passions, and unmortified Affections, are the true original Fountain from whence flow all those bitter Streams of Anguish, Perplexity, and Discontent. And when these are subdued, or brought under Subjection, the Mind is then enlarged and set at liberty, and capable of exercising and enjoying itself in Peace and Serenity. The Pressures and Calamities of human Life, the irksome Task of Repentance, and the severe Discipline of the Cross, are great Trials indeed of Patience, and must bring Trouble and Uneasiness along with them; but even these, when borne with Meekness and Resignation, will end in Comfort at last, and procure for us that Peace of God

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God which passeth all Understanding. And except these Cases, there is more true Joy and Satisfaction to be found in the Ways of Piety, and in the Practice of Virtue, than in all the Delights and delicious Entertainments that Vice and Vanity are able to furnish or afford. And the more we decline from the Ways of Vice, and adhere to those of Virtue and Goodness, the more solid will be our Comfort, and the more lasting our Peace. This is the *general* Effect of aiming at Perfection, but this is not always the Case: The Enemy of Souls is ever seeking and labouring to disturb and disquiet the Minds of good Christians; and therefore the Apostle, by advising such to *be of good Comfort*, seems to intimate, among other Things, that they should not hearken to his Suggestions, or give way to melancholly and desponding Thoughts, which most commonly proceed from the evil One; but that being conscious to themselves of their own Integrity, they should go on with Vigour, Courage, and Chearfulness, and be grieved or troubled only or chiefly, whenever they happen to fail in their Duty, or to do any Thing that they know to be offensive and displeasing to God. This is the greatest and justest Cause
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of Sorrow ; and they that are sorry upon this account, will have Joy of their Sorrow, and be the more refreshed and comforted afterwards, for having mourned and wept.

Thirdly, Another Branch of Duty which the Apostle here exhorts us to, is Unanimity in point of Doctrine——*Be of one Mind*. Indeed the Opinions and Sentiments of Men are almost as various and different as their Persons. Their Judgments are always fallible, and often erroneous. They are subject to great Mistakes in the common Affairs of this Life, and much more likely to be so, in the great Concerns of Religion. And after they have searched and found out the Truth, and have for some Time embraced it, and made Profession of it, they are still liable to be led away with the Error of the Wicked, and to fall from their own Stedfastness. How then, may it be said, can the Apostle expect or require, that Christians should be *of one Mind*? I answer, the Thing is difficult, but not impossible ; and tho' the Command may appear at first to be somewhat too strict, it will be found upon Inquiry to be highly necessary and reasonable. The Possibility of Christians being *of one Mind*, or having one Faith, is plain

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plain from what has been already. The first Converts to Christianity are represented in Scripture to be *of one Heart, and of one Soul*, and to have *continued stedfastly in the Apostles Doctrine*, as well as in Communion and Prayer. And this was the general Case of Christians for about three Centuries, being all of the same Mind and of the same Judgment in point of Doctrine. But afterwards, when the Number of Christians was greatly increased, and Churches multiplied throughout the World, the State of Christianity became divided, and a strange Variety of Innovations in Doctrine and Worship, one after another, corrupted the Purity and Simplicity of the Primitive Faith. And from hence we may discern the Expediency, Usefulness, and Excellence of *Creeds* in general; the Design of which was to unite Christians in the Acknowledgment of the Truth, that as there is but *one Faith*, so there might be but *one Profession*. And that private Christians might not be left to collect for themselves the chief Articles of Faith, that are taught and delivered in several Places of Scripture, lest they should insert for *necessary* Points what were *not so*, and leave out some that are necessary

cessary and fundamental, the Church has thought fit at different Times to draw up certain Summaries or Compendiums, which they called *Creeds*, from the general Design of them, which have been of standing Use in the Church ever since. The first of these is termed the *Apostles Creed*, either as composed by them, or drawn from their Writings. Which ever it be, 'tis agreed on all Hands to be very ancient; and which the Persons to be baptised in those Days were obliged to repeat, or to give their Assent to (or to some other like Form or Confession of Faith) before they were admitted to the Sacrament of Baptism. But when the Divinity of our Blessed Lord and of the Holy Ghost came to be denied and disputed, then *other* Terms and Distinctions, than what are used in Scripture, were found necessary, in order to explain, settle, and secure the true Meaning of those prime Articles of the Christian Faith. And this gave Occasion to those two Creeds, that are called the *Nicene* and *Athanasian* Creeds, the first establish'd at the great Council of *Nice*, and the other in Conformity to the Doctrine of the Great *Athanasius*, and which are still retained in our Church, and I trust
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ever will. From this short historical Account of the Nature, Occasion, and Design of *Creeds*, we may the better perceive the *Possibility*, *Reasonableness*, and *Necessity* of what the Apostle here urges and exhorts us to, *namely*, Unanimity in point of Doctrine, or to be of *one Mind*. For from what has been before, we may justly infer, that 'tis very *possible* for us at this Day to be all united (and I hope we are for the main) in one common Faith, or in the Belief of those fundamental Doctrines of Christianity that are contained in our *Creeds*. And the *Reasonableness* of this is likewise no less evident: For certainly God has a Power to impose Laws upon the *Understanding* as well as upon the *Will* of Man, the same Right to oblige us to *believe* what he has revealed as to *practise* what he commands. And he has also given us Powers, and Faculties, and Opportunities for this End; so that nothing is wanting on his Part to keep us *in the Unity of the Faith*, or to make us all of the same Mind and of the same Judgment, in the necessary and more important Points of our Holy Religion. And if we are not, our Errors and Failure in this Case must be owing either to wilful Negligence,

or

or to some sinful Prejudice, or to a corrupt Inclination. Either we do not search and inquire after the Truth with that Zeal, Care, and Diligence that we ought to do; or we come prepossess'd to the Search or Hearing of it, with Notions taken up beforehand without due Examination, or received from others with an implicit Faith; or else we have some secret Antipathy and Aversion to the Things that are to be believed, as opposing and contradicting our worldly Interests, or our sinful Passions and Propensions. And in this Case, it is really amazing to observe, what Trifles and Shadows will often hinder Men from believing, and that the strongest Reasons and the most convincing Demonstrations are sometimes not of Force enough to bring them to the Acknowledgment of the Truth. But beside the undoubted Right that God has to oblige us to believe, and the Powers he has given us for that Purpose, there is a farther Reasonableness in this Case, from the Consideration of our being united in one mystical Body in *Christ*, which requires that the several Members should be supported and sustained, not by different and disagreeing, but by one and the same spiritual Food and Nourishment.

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ment. For as, in the natural Body, the Head is not maintained and preserved by one kind of Food, the Hands by another, and the Feet by another, but all partake of, and are cherished by one and the same; so the same common Faith is designed for the Nourishment, Growth, and Increase of the whole Body of Christians; and no Person can truly be said to belong to this Body, or be justly esteemed a sound and living Member thereof, that professes a different Faith, or that does not partake of the same common Food and Nourishment. And farther, the *Necessity* of being of *one Mind* in point of Doctrine, is as apparent from what has been said, as the *Possibility* and *Reasonableness* of it. For beside that our Saviour expressly asserts, that *he who believeth not shall be damned*, we are assured, that there is but *one Faith*, as there is but *one Lord*; not *one* Set of Articles or revealed Truths for some Christians, and a *different* Set for others. Consequently none can refuse to embrace and profess this *one Faith*, but at the Peril of his Soul. With great Earnestness therefore and Solemnity, does St. *Paul* press this Obligation upon the *Corinthians*, and upon all Christians—*Now*

we beseech you, Brethren, by the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same Thing, and that there be no Divisions amongst you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same Mind, and in the same Judgment. And of how great Consequence and Importance this is, we may farther learn from that most forcible and pathetick Exhortation of his to the *Philippians*—*If there be therefore any Consolation in Christ, if any Comfort of Love, if any Fellowship of the Spirit, if any Bowels and Mercies, fulfill ye my Joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same Love, being of one Accord, of one Mind.* Seeing then that 'tis both *possible, reasonable, and necessary*, as I have endeavour'd to prove, to be of *one Mind*, let us pay a due Regard to the Oracles of Truth, and prepare ourselves likewise for the Search of our Fathers (those I mean, that were for the main united in the same Faith) and ask for the good old Way in which they walked, and which they have chalked out to us. Let us be always ready to embrace and profess the ancient Faith and establish'd Truths, and beware of all Innovations and Deviations in the more necessary and essential Parts of Christian Doctrine; since we must
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give an Account of our Faith as well as our Practice; and our Practice is to be influenced and regulated by our Faith. And this leads me to consider the

Fourth Particular recommended by the Apostle, which is mutual Agreement with regard to Practice.—*Live in Peace.* To speak of the Nature, Extent, Obligations, and Advantages of this Duty, would require a Discourse by itself. I can therefore, in the *Conclusion* of a Discourse, only observe very briefly, that Peace is the Wish and Desire of all, but the Study and Endeavour of very few. Men naturally expect a civil and peaceable Behaviour from others, but don't take that Care as they ought to cherish and maintain a peaceable Disposition in themselves. But if we desire Peace, we must begin here. We can't command the Tempers and Actions of other Men, nor hinder them from doing what their Passions and Inclinations prompt them to. But we may be Masters of ourselves, and suppress and subdue those irregular Motions in our own Breasts, that too commonly create great Uneasiness and Disturbance. If we would learn to be *patient*, we should soon become *peaceable*. But while we seem

resolved to bear with nothing from others, that is really or seemingly offensive, we must continue Strangers to this Virtue, and to the Blessedness of it. All that a Christian has to do, is to secure the Peace of his own Mind, and to endeavour, as much as lies in him, *to live peaceably with all Men.* This, I say, is all that is required of a Christian in this Respect; but if, notwithstanding this, others will still seek to vex, molest, and disquiet him, the Fault is *theirs*, and not *his*, and the Consequences will be imputed to *them*, and not to *him*. But did Men duly consider, of what vast Advantage a peaceable Temper is at present, of how great Price in the Sight of God, how comfortable and beneficial to themselves, and how great the Reward of it will be hereafter, they would by all Means *seek Peace, and ensue it*, labour to obtain it themselves, and to promote it among others, *endeavouring to keep the Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace*; especially if they consider'd, in the

Last Place, the Promise here subjoined of a Blessing upon such Christian Endeavours and Deportment—*And the God of Love and Peace shall be with you.* And he that understands the Meaning of these Words, or
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knows what they imply and what they denote, can desire no greater Motive to live in Peace. For to have the God of Love and Peace with us, is to have a feeling Sense of his more immediate Favour and Protection, and to be placed, in a manner, above the Reach of Danger and Disturbance. God is the Author of Peace, and Lover of Concord, and delights to dwell with those that are of a quiet and peaceable Disposition; and wherever he vouchsafes to dwell, Joy and Comfort must dwell there too. Nor does he only give inward Joy and Consolation, but often sends likewise the Blessing of outward Peace. 'Tis he that creates the Fruit of the Lips, Peace, Peace to him that is afar off, and to him that is near. And when he sees a People peaceably inclined, patient of Injuries, and slow to avenge themselves, and careful of their Duty in other Respects, he will either secure them from Disturbances from their Enemies, or give them Victory and Success in Time of War. Let us then take care at this Time not to forfeit the Blessing of God by any undutiful Deportment towards him, or unpeaceable Behaviour among ourselves. Our main Dependance is upon him, and our chief Con-

cern there should be not to offend him.
If we only take care of this, we may safely
trust all Events to his wise and merciful Pro-
vide, and rest secure of Deliverance, or
Support in every Danger or Calamity.

To him therefore, FATHER, SON, and
HOLY GHOST, three Persons, and one
God, be ascribed, as is most due, all
Honour, Power, Dominion, and Thank-
giving, now, henceforth, and for ever.
Amen.

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